

THE HISTORY

OF

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

228 Yorktown Road

Tabb, Virginia 23602

BY

Mrs. Elizabeth Page Smith

**For Reference**

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PENINSULA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

The Original Big Bethel Baptist Church

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## PACE

## DECICATION

This history is dedicated to all those "Bethelonians" who, for the glory of God, have worked with earnest endeavor and sincere fervor in spreading the message of Our Lord's love and His gift of salvation by building Bethel Baptist Church and by continuing in faithful service for Him.

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Bethel Pastors and Buildings 1817-1978



W. T. Covington (right), chairman of the Building Committee for Bethel's Sixth Church Building, watched as Robert Carol Emerson placed the cornerstone in 1965.

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1817-Bethel Meeting-House constructed in Hampton on Cloverdale Plantation.  
1828-1834-John Goodall-Bethel with Hampton Baptist.  
1836-1837-John Goodall-Bethel with Hampton.  
1840-Bethel Church constituted with 13 members from Hampton Baptist.  
1840-1841-James Chappell Clopton, first pastor.  
1842-1851-E. S. Amory. Church moved to York County, second building.  
1854-W. S. Hawkins.  
1855-1861-J. L. Trueman.  
1862-1865-War years; Church burned; Used brush arbor.  
1865-1874-J. L. Trueman-Slab building at Little Bethel; Third church built.  
1875-1880-W. R. Webb-Fourth church building.  
1881-M. S. Reed.  
1882-M. L. Wood, Supply pastor.  
1882-1892-W. R. Webb.  
1893-1894-W. R. Keefe.  
1895-1900-H. T. Allison.  
1900-1902-E. T. Higgason.  
1903-W. L. Britt.  
1905-1906-W. R. Keefe.  
1907-1909-J. B. Childress.  
1909-1911-J. E. Welsh.  
1912-1915-George A. Harris.  
1917-1918-R. H. Abrams.  
1919-1920-A. L. Turner.  
1920-1923-H. P. Lamb.

Bethel Pastors and Buildings 1817-1978(continued)

1923-1926-\_\_\_\_\_.

1926-1930-L. Peyton Little-Fifth Church Building on Yorktown Road at Tabb.

1930-Clayton D. Sweet.

1930-1941-N. D. Blackman.

1941-1945-J. Harvey Nichols-Fulltime Pastor.

1945-1948-Robert L. Murphy.

1949-1952-Harold L. Crute.

1953-1960-Robert E. Connely.

1960-1964-Robert Estes.

1964-1970-David C. Anderson-Sixth Church Building.

1971-~~1972~~-Edsel Lee West.

Youth Pastors

1972-1975-Wayne Bennett.

1976-\_\_\_\_-Paul Rogers.

One of three monuments placed around the site of the Civil War Battle of Big Bethel, 1861. This monument is located where the Confederates made their stand in the yard around Big Bethel Baptist Church in York County. Other monuments are in Bethel Park, Hampton.



Reverend L. Peyton Little  
Pastor of Bethel Baptist Church  
1926 - 1930



Reverend and Mrs. N. D. Blackman, Pastor of Bethel, 1930 - 1941



BETHEL WIVES and PASTORS 1941 - 1960



Reverend and Mrs. J.  
Harvey Nichols, Pastor  
1941 - 1944

Reverend Harvey Nichols was Bethel's first full time pastor. Mrs. Nichols came to Bethel as a young bride, the second time in Bethel's history that a pastor brought his bride to Bethel.



Reverend and Mrs. Robert Murphy, Pastor of Bethel, 1945 - 1948

Reverend Edsel L. West and Family, Pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, 1971 - 1978



Dear Members and Friends of Bethel,

It is my prayer that as you read this history of Bethel Baptist Church, you will see the movement of God's hand on this church through the years. His grace has been sufficient for all the experiences of our church. To God be the glory -- great things He hath done!

I believe you will also have a deeper appreciation for these people who had a vision for this church. At times adverse conditions made it difficult, but they did not allow the vision to die. Bethel Baptist Church lives today as the body of Christ serving God and ministering to people.

This history is the history of God at work in people who believed in Him, loved Him, love the church, and loved people. The future will demonstrate the same faith and love.

The church is indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth Page Smith for her many hours of research and for compiling this history.

Rev. Edsel L. West



Former Pastors of Bethel, 1920 - 1965

H. P. Lamb, Clayton D. Sweet, N. D. Blackman, Harvey Nichols, Harold Crute, R. E. Conneley, Robert Estes, David Anderson. (Picture taken on Dedication Day, October 31, 1965. Robert Murphy absent. Rev. L. P. Little passed away in 1939; Lamb and Sweet have passed away since 1965.)

## CHAPTER I: THE FOUNDING FATHERS

In 1769 Elijah Baker, a native of Lunenburg County, was baptized. After establishing churches in his area, he began to look for a broader field. His new mission became the territory between the York and James River, known as the Peninsula. Records show that the Reverend Elijah Baker, an extremely energetic man, evangelized the communities around Grafton Baptist Church in York County as early as 1775, and this church was constituted in 1777. John Wright, baptized by Mr. Baker in 1776, became the first pastor of Grafton congregation. Elder John Wright, along with Dr. Thomas Chisman, was the leader who did the most to organize Hampton Baptist Church, which was constituted in 1791.<sup>2</sup> The founding of the first Baptist churches on the Peninsula is indeed an example of Christian outreach, on which the spread of the gospel has always depended.

In reviewing the history of the start of the early churches, one is impressed by the remarkable leading of the Spirit in the spread of the gospel and in the response to the call. Yet these early churches were not without difficulties, for from 1813 to 1828 the Hampton Church, as an example, was without regular pastors. A tradition states that Robert Tisdale and Peter Ainslie were the pastors. (The latter was the pastor of Grafton Baptist Church, beginning in 1827.)

One of the reasons for the difficulties of the Hampton church around 1813 was the war with England which had started the year before. Because Hampton was on the east coast and near the Hampton Roads Harbor, the British could attack this small town very easily. It has even been said that the Hampton church during this time was a casualty of the War of 1812. For example, Hampton was invaded in June, 1813, when a large British force of military men defeated the local militia. Many of the citizens fled, and homes were "looted, sacked and burned."<sup>3</sup> After a few weeks the people who had fled returned because the invaders moved on, but the constant uncertainty of the times created many of the problems which hindered the growth of the church.

During this time when the Hampton Baptist Church had no regular pastoral leadership, our Lord raised up a layman who preserved and spread the Baptist cause. James Moody Vaughan of Cloverdale, a plantation extending about nine miles north of the village of Hampton, was this leader. James Moody Vaughan had married Miss Adriane Hudgins, the daughter of a wealthy planter, Houlder Hudgins, and had added in 1817 to his own real estate holdings the Cloverdale estate. (At the Langley Air Force Base is a fenced area protecting the Vaughan burying ground on what was once a section of the Cloverdale plantation.)<sup>4</sup> Not only did James Moody Vaughan give his energies to the Hampton church, but under his leadership a meeting house, called Bethel, was built on his plantation. This became the Bethel branch of the Hampton church, and this was the beginning of Big Bethel Baptist Church.

James Moody Vaughan was a very prominent and influential man. At one time he was sheriff of Elizabeth City County, now Hampton, and one of the magistrates. When he felt the need to have a church building on his plantation nine miles north of Hampton, for the use of Baptists, he met with some opposition and experienced difficulty in securing the necessary material for the church's construction. Such strong leader as Mr. Vaughan, however, would not be defeated by this obstacle. So he actually had the main timbers for this building transported by water, from Mathews County.<sup>5</sup> Cloverdale extended all the way to Sawyer Swamp Road (now Big Bethel Road), and the original site of the church was built on this road, approximately a mile from the Bethel Reservoir. (1978) Bethel's first building must have been erected in 1817,<sup>6</sup> but it was not until 1B21 that the name Bethel appeared in the Dover Associational minutes at Bethel Meeting-house.

Bethel became the "strong right arm of the Hampton church." In that day it was customary for a church to have several outposts, or preaching stations, while all the members belonged to the central church. In this way Bethel functioned for a number of years as the meeting house of the Hampton Baptist Church. Thus, denominational meetings were arranged for, and the members met at Bethel in Elizabeth City County again and again in preference to Hampton.<sup>7</sup> The general belief for this action is that the building constructed for Bethel was more comfortable than the Hampton building where "worshippers sat on seats without backs, looking at walls without plaster, and through windows without glass."<sup>8</sup>

In 1828 Bethel and Hampton united in calling a pastor, John Goodall, a schoolmaster who had recently come to York County. In the War of 1B12 he had served as a major in the state militia, taking part in the defense against the 1813 British invasion of Hampton. During these fearful times, Major Goodall had two moving experiences. The first was the instant death of a man who stood beside him in battle. The second was one in which Major Goodall saved the life of his drummer boy. He considered these incidents to be God's callings for special religious work, and after some time he eventually yielded. He was baptized in 1827, and seeing the need at Hampton, he was ordained in 1828.<sup>9</sup>

John Goodall served at Hampton and Bethel for five years, after which he resigned to accept the call of Cumberland Street Baptist Church in Norfolk. The new relationship did not turn out to be a happy one for either party, and on January 1, 1836, he returned to the Hampton churches to settle among the people who loved him so devotedly that they had purchased a farm for him near Hampton. Nevertheless, when he had served two years more, he had to resign, as he was selected to be General Agent for the Virginia and Foreign Baptist Bible Society. As their agent, he traveled extensively all over Virginia, preaching and raising money for the newly formed society.<sup>10</sup>

When John Goodall resigned from Hampton (and Bethel) a second time, the membership paid him the following tribute:

"We loved him as a father loveth his own children. Connected as he was with us for more than eleven years, the greatest part of which he acted as our pastor, we cannot but deplore this afflicting dispensation of Divine Providence."<sup>11</sup>

In 1B31 reports indicated that all was peace and harmony in the Hampton Church and in the Bethel Meetinghouse, but since 1825 the reforms advocated by the Reverend Alexander Campbell had been debated widely. This minister emphasized, among other doctrines, church union, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, and the necessity of baptism for salvation. For seven years a controversial spirit had prevailed throughout the Dover Association, an organization of all the Southern Baptist Churches from around Richmond to Hampton Roads. Campbell's followers called themselves the Reformers. In October, 1832 the Dover Association repudiated Campbell's theological position, and five pastors were dismissed. The Grafton Baptist Church was split because the pastor, Peter Ainslie, had come under the influence of Campbell, and he was one of the first named by the Dover Association. Out of this division, the Grafton Christian Church of York County was founded.<sup>12</sup>

In 1839 the Hampton Church entertained at its Bethel Meetinghouse the annual meeting of the Dover Association--at that time the largest Baptist district association in the world. Several thousand people usually attended these meetings. It was necessary, therefore, for the host church to provide a covered place on the grounds to accommodate the crowds that attended preaching services during these gatherings. At this large meeting one of the ministers made an appeal for an offering from the association to be used for state missions: this resulted in a collection of \$42.82,<sup>13</sup> probably an indication of the regard held at that time for this young missionary endeavor.

Bethel was constituted as a church in 1840 with thirteen white members who withdrew from the Hampton church. Since the church's early minutes are unavailable, no one knows the exact identity of these members. The Dover Association Minutes of 1840 list as Bethel's messengers to the associational meeting three names: John H. Winder, John L. Wright, and James C. Clopton, pastor. The first pastor of Bethel was James Campbell Clopton, son of the pastor of the church at Charles City and a brother of Samuel C. Clopton (the first missionary appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention.) Both John Goodall and James Chappell Clopton were college men, receiving their collegiate training at the College of William and Mary.<sup>14</sup> In 1B41 the Dover Association Minutes showed Bethel with 37 members, 13 white and 24 colored. Also, it is known that Thomas Crandol was the first church clerk.

Elder E. S. Amory was pastor of Bethel from 1843 to 1851. During his pastorate the church was moved from its original site in Elizabeth City County (Hampton) across the creek into York County, and Bethel's second building was erected.<sup>15</sup> (The creek was the dividing line between Elizabeth City County and York County.) Bethel's new location was on the north side of the creek on a hill, and the church property was extensive enough to provide a cemetery for the membership, a requirement in those days. Elder Amory, who had served in Gloucester, was originally from King and Queen County, where he had served as pastor directly before coming to Bethel. When he came to York County, he became pastor of Grafton and Denburg, along with Bethel. However, he was pastor of only the last two at the time of his death in 1851. During his tenure at Bethel, Elder Amory was faithful in his attendance at the Dover Associational meetings as one of the church's messengers. Others who attended at various times were Thomas Crandol, Christopher Curtis, J. L. Wright, and William Croswell.

Thomas Crandol was referred to as a licentiate or as an assistant pastor. Elder Amory gave his home address as Halfway House, York County. The Halfway House was located at the corner of Yorktown Road and Big Bethel Road, across from the location of Tabb High School, today. This corner was supposedly halfway between Hampton and Yorktown.

History records many turbulent events taking place in our country at this time just before the Civil War. Since communication was poor, many political problems, such as states' rights, slavery, etc., were debated. Yet, in the rural countryside such as the counties of York and Elizabeth City were then, the most pressing and often the most passionate discussions centered around religion, at that time due largely to the Campbell movement, which had caused so many churches to be divided.

On October 29, 1844, Elder Amory's friend, Dr. G. Lane Corbin, a medical doctor, agreed to act as moderator of a debate held in the newly formed Grafton Christian Church (Brick Church.) The meeting which had been extremely publicized was well attended and excitement was high. John Curtis, pastor of Grafton Christian and a fluent speaker, would debate the pastor of the local Methodist Church over their denominational differences. (In Little's History of Grafton Baptist Church is an elaborate account, in which Dr. Corbin described every minute detail of the proceedings.)

The question to be debated concerned two: First, Faith, Repentance, and Baptism necessary to constitute a Christian. John Curtis affirmed; the Methodist minister denied. Second, the heart of man is changed by the spirit of God itself. The Methodist minister affirmed; John Curtis denied.

Mr. Curtis, who led off the debate, stated that the subject to be brought before the hearers was a "thousand times more important than all the political questions then before the country." So strongly did Mr. Curtis feel this and so keen was the tension that the stress of the moment must have been too great, for after asking for help, Mr. Curtis collapsed, just as he was beginning to discuss the subject of repentance. Dr. Corbin described the effect of this calamity upon Mr. Curtis' family and upon the congregation. The doctor poured ether into the mouth of Mr. Curtis, rubbed ether on the temples, but was unable to revive him.<sup>16</sup>

This true account is given as one example of the denominational differences debated widely well into the twentieth century, without, however, the unfortunate results as on this occasion. Most discussions, while perhaps quite heated at times, were usually in private groups. Today, with America's continued emphasis upon religious freedom and with ministers from every faith working together to combat the Satanic evil about us, our hope is that such arguing has been relegated to the past. Also, we are very thankful that today doctors know more about giving resuscitation to heart patients.

For some time the Dover Association had urged the churches to start Sunday Schools. The first reference for Bethel's Sunday School was made in 1853 when in the association minutes the church listed 30 in attendance with John P. Mallicote as being the superintendent. In 1854 Thomas Crandol, the assistant pastor, was the Sunday School superintendent, and his comment about the school was that it was "Interesting."

## CHAPTER II: THE WAR YEARS

The years 1850-1866 were very difficult ones for the rather young constituted church, one that had only recently been relocated. Then, too, the country was fast becoming embroiled in the Civil War, which would have a devastating effect upon the Virginia Peninsula.

After Elder Amory's death in 1851, Bethel was evidently without a pastor for two years. The Dover Association Minutes for 1854 show that Bethel's messengers to the associational meeting were Rev. W. H. Hawkins, C. Curtis, J. K. Savage, and T. Crandol. Elder W. S. Hawkins of Gloucester County served the Bethel membership for only one year and was succeeded by Elder J. L. Trueman, who was still pastor when the war between the states came on.<sup>17</sup> Elder Trueman, apparently, was a man deeply concerned with spreading the gospel, for by 1859 the Bethel membership had grown to 306 (135 of these were colored), the greatest number reached during the first one hundred years of Bethel's beginning in 1840.

When the church was moved over into York County, those members who resided closer to Hampton felt the need for a house of worship more accessible. In the new location Bethel was about three or four miles away, and the roads were rough. Bethel, sometime after Elder Trueman came on the field, sponsored the building of a small mission chapel in the area nearer Hampton. This movement was similar to that of the Hampton Baptist Church when the Bethel Meetinghouse was founded. The members who attended the new small mission chapel called their chapel "Little Bethel" to distinguish it from the parent church. Elder Trueman held worship services there the first and third Sunday afternoon of each month.<sup>18</sup>

From this time on Bethel was called Big Bethel Church to identify the mother church, and the communities around each church took the respective names. When Little Bethel became a constituted church, the membership changed the name to Liberty. Likewise, in the years to come, when Big Bethel was moved again, the "Big" was dropped. With the change in church names, the communities lost their separate identities. Nevertheless, the name Big Bethel continues today in the Hampton-York County Highway (formerly Sawyer Swamp Road) and in a newer Baptist church, which recently located on this highway.

Elder Trueman and the Big Bethel members intended to establish another meeting place, this time in Poquoson, but all of this expansion had to be curtailed. On April 12, 1861, the Federal garrison at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, was fired upon. President Lincoln ordered Virginia to send 2340 troops to stop secession. Five days later the Virginia Delegate Assembly, which had been in session since February, passed the ordinance of secession. The capital of the Confederate States of America became Richmond.

The first notable land battle of the Civil War was fought around the property of Big Bethel Baptist Church, and for many years the Battle of Big Bethel received much attention. "That insignificant battle," wrote

Mr. Little, "when subsequent engagements are considered, sufficient to distribute the name of this small Baptist church all over the land, and monuments have been erected in both the North and the South with the name of Bethel on them."<sup>19</sup>

According to national publications the unfortunate results of the Battle of Big Bethel to the Union forces was due to a misunderstanding of military orders. Since Fort Monroe was the strongest enclosed fortification in the country in 1861, troops had been rushed here so that the Federal government could control the entrance to Hampton Roads. At the same time, the Confederates, realizing the need to protect the mouths of the York and James Rivers, sent capable regiments to various strategic posts. One of the regiments was an organization of well-trained men called the First North Carolina Volunteers. This regiment was sent to an advanced position and moved south to Little Bethel. When the general at Fort Monroe heard of the Confederate action, he ordered troops from Camp Hamilton (Hampton) and also from Camp Butler (Newport News) to converge near Little Bethel and to attack at daybreak. Through a mixup in the communications, the Federal troops fired upon each other. This blunder gave the Confederates time to withdraw to Big Bethel where they had the stronger fortifications. During the fracas at Little Bethel, the little mission chapel was set on fire and destroyed.

One of the North Carolina Volunteers, who was in the battle, writing to his father afterwards, described days previous to the battle: "On the morning of the 6th, we took up our march from Yorktown in the direction of Hampton. After marching about 15 miles, we stopped at Bethel Church, a place the enemy had been a few days previously. On arriving there wet and worn out with fatigue, we ate our morsels of bread and meat, then spread our blankets down on the wet ground and slept for the night."<sup>20</sup>

The creek which was the boundary line between the counties of York and Elizabeth City (now Hampton) has in recent years been made into a reservoir, so that almost all of the original site of the battlefield at Big Bethel is now under water. The Confederates stationed themselves on the north side of the creek, mainly in the churchyard, and waited for the Union troops to attack. On June 10, 1861, the enemy appeared on the hill opposite. In a few hours the battle was over, and the Confederates suffered only 1 killed and 7 wounded. The wounded were brought into the church while the fighting continued. The Union losses were somewhat greater, and at that time Confederates thought they had achieved an important victory.

Today, on the south side of the reservoir, over an acre of the original battlefield where the Union troops were has been made into a park for the military, named Bethel Park. Three monuments have been erected to commemorate some aspect of this first battle. One monument \* marks the spot where Private Henry Lawson Wyatt of North Carolina fell, the first Southern soldier to be killed in regular battle. He had shown great bravery by volunteering to set fire to a farmhouse harboring Union sharpshooters. In 1905, the Daughters of the Confederacy placed two monuments, one in Bethel Park and the other in the churchyard of Big Bethel Baptist Church. People traveling Big Bethel Road today, who wonder at seeing a tall monument with a cemetery beside it, do not realize that

once here was a church that had an active part in sheltering the Civil War wounded.

Apparently, Big Bethel, caught between Hampton and Yorktown, really felt the brunt of the war. The Hampton-Yorktown road passed right beside the Bethel Church property, almost identical with the way that Big Bethel Road is today. When troops from either side passed, they had to go very close to the church. Sometime before the war was over, the church building was destroyed.

In later years, many people have written about the devastation of this section of the Peninsula during the war. In the history of the Hampton Baptist Church, the authors quote from an appeal published in February, 1862, by a committee of Richmond citizens:

"In the month of May, last, the Peninsula was suddenly invaded by the Federal Army and the inhabitants of its lower extremity, including the town of Hampton and numbering between two and three thousand white persons, were compelled to make a hasty retreat, abandoning their homes, and almost their entire property to the enemy. Their growing crops were destroyed, their provisions and stock were seized by the invaders, their slaves were seduced or forced from their homes, and to crown misfortunes, the town of Hampton was, in midsummer, burnt to the ground by order of the officers of the Confederate Army as a military necessity. The County of Elizabeth City has been reduced to desolation. These refugees are scattered throughout the lower counties of the State, and many of them are known to be in extreme destitution and want..."<sup>21</sup>

Another church history quotes Rev. J. J. Marks as having written about his experiences in and around Hampton in 1862. He related that on the morning of April 4, 1862, the United States Army left Hampton and reached "Great Bethel" about 2 p.m. "This was the scene of a disastrous battle fought June 10, 1861, when Lt. John T. Greble (West Point graduate) and Major Theodore Winthrop were both killed. Some of the officers took tea at the home of a poor woman whose husband was in the Confederate Army. She was typical of the destitute families in that area where the women and children were defenseless and unprotected." Another source on the Civil War stated that in April, 1862, more than 2000 soldiers landed in York County, spreading destruction through the county and killing both livestock and fowl.<sup>22</sup>

Elder Trueman, "a loyal son of the South," was the first in the section to volunteer his services as a private in the Confederate Army. When the war was over, he returned to Big Bethel and was present at the first meeting of the church on August 17, 1865.<sup>23</sup> Of the 306 members that Big Bethel had just before the outbreak of the war, at its close, when they came together, they could report only 33.<sup>24</sup> During the war the membership had worshipped in homes, while maintaining their faith in our Lord and Saviour. Mr. Little referred to the members worshipping in a brush arbor; this must have happened immediately after the Civil War when the members had no building in which to meet.

Elder Trueman was called again as pastor of the Big Bethel Church, and the two communities now worked together, holding their meetings in a hastily constructed worship building. A crude house, made of pine logs and covered with pine slabs, was erected in the place where the

Little Bethel Mission had stood. This building, known as the Slab House,<sup>25</sup> was used for a general public meeting place as well as for church services.

Almost immediately, Big Bethel took the necessary steps to erect a new building. The membership accomplished this by acquiring the material from a hospital ward used by the Federals at Camp Hamilton. This ward is said to have stood where the present Bayberry Hospital now stands. The boards in the new Bethel building were placed in an "up and down" fashion, making the structure unpretentious in appearance, but Elder Trueman referred to it as a "very neat and comfortable house."<sup>26</sup>

In 1866, the delegates to the Dover Associational Meeting were Rev. J. L. Trueman, Elias Todd, James K. Savage, and John L. Saunders. Elder Trueman served Big Bethel until 1874, making fifteen years there, not counting the war years. During these years he also served at Denbigh.

### CHAPTER III: ANOTHER NEW BUILDING AND TWO NEW CHURCHES

Elder Tyue man was untiring in his devotion to the spread of the gospel. From 1865 to 1874, he was pastor of Big Bethel and Denbigh, held Sunday afternoon services at Little Bethel on alternate Sundays, and led the Bethel members in establishing the mission in Poquoson, which the war had interrupted. The Poquoson mission was needed because the Bethel members in Poquoson could not attend their church regularly due to poor facilities of transportation. They were even farther away than those at Little Bethel. As usual, in the beginning services were held in the homes of people in the Poquoson community. After two or three years a chapel was built in Hunt's Neck near the Poquoson River.<sup>27</sup>

Elder W. R. Webb came in 1875 and was pastor of Big Bethel for six years. He is remembered for two important achievements. Under his leadership the members erected in 1876 their fourth building.<sup>28</sup> This was the building that fifty years later was condemned and purchased by the United States government.

Pictures of the fourth Bethel sanctuary show a simple building—white—with one large main room for the worship services. Sunday School classes would also meet here but in different areas of the room. There were no partitions. Located in those quiet and picturesque surroundings with trees standing tall, the church is a symbol of the calm which follows a storm. This vicinity was at last recovering from the ruins of a dreadful and disastrous war, and the members could concentrate on a more orderly way of life.

The first couple married in the new church was Sarah Virginia Cook and Scott Copeland Wood, parents of Mrs. Jones Wood Purcell, a former president of Bethel's WMU. The wedding took place at the close of a morning worship service, probably due to poor transportation and other inconveniences, such as church lighting, heating, etc. Early minutes show that the church business meetings were always held after services on Sunday, whether morning or afternoon, perhaps for the same reasons.

The church minutes for 1875 record the names of twenty-one men who were assigned as a begging committee to raise money to pay for the new building: Elias Todd, Christopher Curtis, Edward Moore, Starkey Moore, George Sanders, Christopher Nettles, John R. Thomas, William Nettles, Robert Hopkins, William Landrum, John Landrum, Edward Smithers, James Sanders, John Todd, Joseph Nettles, William Moore, William Bartlett, John S. Saunders, Edmund Moore, James K. Savage, and John Nettles. No woman would ever be placed on any committee.

Among the customs in those times was the election of the pastor annually at the regular church meeting held in January, which was then the first month in the church year. (Today, churches usually have October as the first month.) One year Elder Trueman had fifteen members for him, and three against him. Since every member present at the church

service was expected to stay afterwards for the business session, many members must have abstained from voting. In spite of the fact that he was voted on annually, the pastor was always re-elected. Furthermore, while Bethel people may, at times, lag in their work for our Lord, they have always honored and revered their pastors who are God's representatives in the leading of His people. Part of the reason for the church's survival in a drastically changing rural community may be attributed to the love and concern of pastor and people for each other.

The years following the Civil War made up an extremely bad period for farming communities everywhere, and Big Bethel was no exception. As would be expected, the raising of funds to pay the pastor his salary was the greatest problem to face the church, and begging committees were appointed again and again to solicit funds for this purpose. The church trustees were the main ones appointed to these committees. Probably, the raising of needed money was the church trustee's main responsibility.

The pastor's salary was discussed openly at the beginning of each year. During the nineteenth century Bethel paid a salary varying from \$200 to \$400; on one occasion the church raised the salary \$48, from \$202 for the year to \$250. While the amount of money was small by today's standards, the farmers who made up the majority of the membership were very generous in such as they had. The pastor shared in whatever vegetables the farm produced, and even feed for his horse, if needed.

Still another concern for all the Baptist churches at this time was the conduct of the members within the church body, and Bethel, like other churches, spent much time in church discipline. Those members who were absent too many times from services on Sunday, who sold or indulged in the use of ardent spirits (as one writer described it), who visited bar rooms and pool rooms, who were profane, who were having disputes between husband and wife, or who acted toward other members with conduct judged unbecoming for Christians, were visited by a specially appointed committee and urged to reform. If they showed no inclination to change, after many attempts to persuade them failed, the church dismissed these members, and the church clerk wrote "Dismissed" by the member's name in the roll book. Some members were reinstated after presenting evidence that they had changed in their actions. Such church discipline at Bethel was discontinued when the church began to weaken around the turn of the century.

Hardly had the Big Bethel members become settled in their new building when in 1878 the people in the Poquoson mission felt led to become a constituted church. Elder Webb had continued the leadership of the mission, just as Elder Trueman before him. The work had made excellent progress, and now "a unanimous desire had sprung up in the hearts of the supporters of Emmaus to constitute themselves into a Christian church, feeling that such action would best promote the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom in their community."<sup>29</sup> The guidance of the mission into a regular church was Mr. Webb's second great achievement.

On June 21, 1878, twenty-seven members of Big Bethel Baptist Church were "granted letters of dismission to organize a regular Baptist church at Emmaus chapel in Poquoson, York County." Their church was constituted on July 14, 1878, and they called Rev. W. R. Webb to be their pastor, too.<sup>30</sup>

For many years, thereafter, the same pastor served both Bethel and Emmaus, although not always in consecutive years.

Elder Webb stayed with Big Bethel until 1881, when Rev. M. S. Reed from Baltimore was pastor for one year,<sup>31</sup> In a letter to the Religious Herald of September 15, 1881, Rev. L. R. Milbourne, pastor of Denbigh, and later founder of the First Baptist Church of Newport News wrote:

"The Baptist cause in this part of the Peninsula is prospering, Brother Webb, colporter for the Sunday School and Bible Board, and myself, recently held all-day meetings at Emmaus, Bethel, and Denbigh. We spent a week at each church, calling upon sinners to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. The Lord's people were greatly revived, and thirty souls accepted Christ as their Saviour. Twenty-seven were added to the churches by baptism. Others are awaiting the ordinance. The ungodly were generally awakened....Rev. M. S. Reed of Baltimore will enter upon his duties as pastor of Bethel, Emmaus and Grafton churches the first Lord's day of September. The people are anxiously awaiting his arrival. They were all drawn to him during his visit here in July. I know Brother Reed well. Was with him two years at Crozer. He is a good man, a good preacher, and an earnest workman in his Master's vineyard. I am truly glad to have him so near me."<sup>32</sup>

Whatever happened to cause Mr. Reed to stay only one year is not known. Incidentally, Rev. M. L. Milbourne lived in Tabb in the Smithville area, and his first wife who died at childbirth is buried in the Smith cemetery.

Rev. M. L. Wood, a ministerial student of Richmond College, was supply pastor at Big Bethel for the summer months of 1882. Then, on the day before Christmas of 1882, the Big Bethel membership again called Rev. W. R. Webb, who served this time for ten years, ending in 1892, making a total of 16 or 17 years altogether. He is credited with baptizing over 200 people during his pastorate and was remembered with deep love and respect by the Bethel people for many years afterwards, as well as by other communities around.<sup>33</sup> In those days in the rural areas, a pastor would usually serve several churches which were small in membership. Until 1941, all of Big Bethel's pastors, except the college students, may have served other churches besides Big Bethel--Grafton, Denbigh, Emmaus, later Liberty. Of course, the last two churches were founded by Bethel members, and Bethel pastors would naturally work with them.

A young preacher, Rev. W. R. Keefe, followed Mr. Webb. It was Mr. Keefe's first pastorate. While at Bethel, he married Miss M. V. Gregory of Norfolk. Mr. Little stated in his history that "this action must have pleased the brethren, for they raised a purse and purchased him a horse as a bridal present." Mr. Keefe's pastorate lasted for two years, when he resigned to accept the call to Orcutt Avenue Baptist Church in 1894.<sup>34</sup>

Rev. H. T. Allison came in 1895 and continued to serve for five years, Bethel paying \$275 and Emmaus \$175 toward his salary.<sup>35</sup> During his pastorate, just before the turn of the century, there appears to have been a rather sharp division of opinion within the Big Bethel mem-

bership. Already a growing feeling had developed among the Little Bethel people that they were numerous enough to have a church which had individual standing, and this division of opinion hastened the work. At a meeting in March, 1900, presided over by Rev. H. T. Allison, thirty-eight members were granted letters of dismission to organize a new church. The thirty-eight met on Sunday, April 1, 1900, when their church was constituted and named Liberty.<sup>36</sup>

Rev. E. T. Higgason was Big Bethel's pastor from 1900 to 1902, followed by Rev. W. L. Britt. The Dover Association Minutes for July, 1903, record as delegates from Bethel: W. L. Britt, pastor; W. Mitchell, and E. Todd, clerk. John R. Thomas was superintendent of the Sunday School. The value of the church building and lot was listed at \$1800, and the value of the parsonage was \$1200. The Bethel parsonage was located across the highway on the Hampton side of the creek at the corner of Semple Farm Road and Big Bethel Road. (1978) Just when the parsonage was acquired is not known but probably during the time when Rev. W. R. Webb was pastor.

In 1903 Rev. W. L. Britt reported to the Dover Association the fact that he was now at Bethel in place of Mr. Higgason and that "Sunday School and prayer meetings have been started.. The prayer meetings have been kept up continuously for more than two months, and the pastor feels encouraged." The membership, however, was down to 186 from 230 in 1902. There had been 14 dismissions by letter that very year.

Looking back now, one can see that the Big Bethel membership began to fall shortly after the turn of the century. The church, weakened by the loss of those members to Emmaus and then to Liberty, along with other problems, was never able to rebuild. Then, too, almost all of Big Bethel's pastors, in the first part of the twentieth century, never felt led to remain on the field long enough to give the church the stable leadership needed. For example, Mr. Britt resigned after one year to be pastor in another state.<sup>37</sup>

At first Big Bethel seemed to be coming back, for Rev. W. R. Keefe was called in 1905. Mr. Keefe was already pastor of Liberty, so that whatever friction might have existed between the members of the two churches in 1900 had passed now into peaceful relations.<sup>38</sup> Mr. Keefe had just come on the field when a special event took place. The Daughters of the Confederacy had planned to memorialize the Big Bethel area some years before. Finally, on June 10, 1905, the monuments, one for the North and one for the South, were unveiled, and Big Bethel held a great celebration.<sup>39</sup> The Confederate monument was the one placed in the churchyard. (Page 6)

Meanwhile, the Dover Association had grown much larger, and the associational meetings were held in such distant locations that two years before, in 1904, the Peninsula churches started their own association. In 1906, the Peninsula Baptist Association held its third annual session at Bethel on August 14-16. Bethel's report for that year showed a membership of 195, and the church had dropped "Big" as part of the name. Yet, as late as 1922, the association minutes have a reference to Big Bethel, and even after the church was moved farther into York County, long-standing members referred to their church as Big Bethel.

At the meeting in 1906, the writer of the minutes stated that Mr. Keefe welcomed the association in a "most beautiful and delightful manner."

The Bethel choir led in the song service in the afternoon of the first day. Another one on the program was Mrs. Keefe, who gave the welcome to the WMU "in a few warm hearty words," although Bethel at that time had no WMU. The total salary paid Mr. Keefe, as reported, was: Bethel-\$250, Emmaus-\$200, and Liberty-\$150.

During the next ten years, Bethel continued to try to withstand the loss in members. Rev. J. B. Childress was pastor for two years from 1907-1909. After him was a Richmond College student, Rev. J. E. Welsh, who served the membership from 1909 to 1911. Then, Rev. George A. Harris came in 1912 and remained as pastor of Bethel for four years.<sup>40</sup> He and his family were greatly admired by the Bethel people as indicated by present-day members who recalled the pleasant association they shared. Nevertheless, the church membership had declined from 195 in 1908 to 65 in 1909 and remained at that number for many years afterwards.

Yet, even though the struggle for Bethel was difficult in these years, our Lord's leadership is evident, for from this one small church emerged two great churches. If the Bethel membership had given up and disbanded, they could still have been proud to have had a part in the spread of the gospel. However, the remnant would not give up; they remained faithful and determined in the midst of adversity. They put their trust in the Apostle Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

#### CHAPTER IV: DARK DAYS AND RECOVERY

By 1916, when Rev. George Harris left Bethel, the United States was becoming involved in the first World War, but no records exist to show if this world-wide struggle was having any effect upon the church. Yet the war must have affected because of the many military personnel stationed on the Peninsula or because of the continued drafting of men for duty. Still another happening of this time which caused great dismay throughout the country was the epidemic of influenza in 1918 and 1919. The sixty-five members and their families must have been caught up in the sweep of this disease like the rest of the country. Also, at this time the question of Prohibition was foremost in the minds of American citizens, and Baptist churches were passing resolutions favoring the passing of this amendment. No records exist to verify that the church was concerned with any of these events, for these were the dark days.

In 1916 Bethel's letter to the Peninsula Association gave only the membership--28 males and 37 females. No further list of messengers and no further reports were ever made that year nor during the next four years. Years later, Bethel members told Rev. L. P. Little that the church was at a stalemate in those days. Plans had been made to sell the pasto-rium and build a new one. The parsonage was sold, but the funds were

used to pay the pastor's salary. With Denbigh, Bethel had three more pastors, Rev. R. H. Abrams was the pastor in 1817-1918; Rev. A. L. Turner served in 1919-1920; and Rev. H. P. Lamb was the pastor 1921-1923.<sup>42</sup> The total membership continued to be the same with little or no increase and with great decrease by 1923. Services were still held but only on Sunday afternoons. In order to keep the church existing, George Savage, church treasurer for many years (Mrs. Lucille Mitchell's father), would visit the members periodically to beg for additional funds.

The sixty-five members came from families who lived not only in the Big Bethel community but also in the surrounding neighborhoods--Harpersville, Tabb, Calthrops Neck, or even nearer Hampton. Most of families still lived on the farms and generally raised truck produce. Farmers took pride in being able to market the year's earliest garden vegetables in Hampton or in Newport News, and each farmer tried to outdo the others in raising early crops. When one talks to a member of the Big Bethel of those days, he hears over and over family names referred to like--Crandol, Croswell, Harper, Hudgins, Mitchell, Savage, Saunders, Smith, Taylor, Thomas, Topping, and Wood. These were the majority of the sixty-five people who kept the church active during the dark days.

In 1916 a still more serious event was taking place which could certainly have drastic effects upon Big Bethel Church. The U. S. Government had been buying the land that one hundred years earlier had been a part of the plantation owned by James M. Vaughan. The government purchased, altogether, 1659 acres for an "Aviation Experimental Station and Proving Grounds," which became Langley Field in 1917. In 1940 another part of the Cloverdale plantation was acquired to make the area known today as the West area of Langley Research Center, NASA.<sup>43</sup>

The Federal Government wanted to make the creek by Big Bethel Church into a reservoir to serve the U. S. Army at Fort Monroe and the Langley Air Force Base. The government, therefore, began to force the church to move in order to enlarge the creek. The Bethel members resisted and for ten years tried to hold on to their church location of more than seventy-five years. Finally, the government condemned and purchased the church building and site, including the cemetery. The last service in this building was on August 15, 1926. The church building was torn down, and many of the graves were moved to other cemeteries as designated by relatives. A few graves remain, a reminder that once a church was in this place. In 1958 records were clarified locally to note that both the Big Bethel Cemetery and the Wyatt monument are government property. The reservoir has expanded so much over the years that water now covers most of the yard and former location of the church.

In the year 1900 a young man, age 15, Charles L. Harper, had joined Big Bethel. Under his leadership, the church was kept alive while going through all of this turmoil, in addition to the loss in membership. Mr. Harper was devoted to Bethel, and Sunday School continued to go on with him as superintendent. He was also teacher of the Men's Bible Class. The members of his family served in various positions, and once a year a revival was held. During these years the Lord blessed Mr. Harper in a material way, and he was able to found a large wholesale business. Yet, Mr. Harper never neglected his church for business, and for more than sixty years his faithful stewardship in time and donations enabled Bethel to push onward. If his company was having a board meeting during a night when Bethel was having a revival or similar service, Mr. Harper and the board adjourned to go to church. Years later in 1963, Bethel honored him for serving as chairman of the deacons for 36 years, a church clerk for 35 years, and for giving most of his life teaching the Adult Men's Bible Class. Again, on his 90th birthday in 1975, the church held a reception in his honor in loving recognition of the spiritual leadership and Christian example which he had shown our church over the past seventy-five years.

By 1926 the Peninsula Baptist Association had employed an associational worker, Rev. L. Peyton Little of Williamsburg. Mr. Little was quite active in helping to establish new mission fields and in rebuilding the older churches. Among his other duties, he reported in 1926 that he sold Bibles "at cost" at two county fairs and had some "gracious experiences I will never forget. At one of these fairs I sold Bibles with jazz music on one side of my table and dancing on the other side."

In his report for 1927, Mr. Little described his meeting with the Bethel membership. "Another church in our association was passing through fiery trails. Our government had condemned her property, purchased the building, and ordered the members to move out. This church had not reported to the Peninsula Association for three years. The last report was in 1923 when the membership had dropped to 35. At our last meeting in Newport News (1926) the associational worker and the moderator, Dr. John Garland Pollard, (later Governor of Virginia) were talking about this old historic church not reporting to the Association, and the moderator asked your worker to go over there and see what could be done. My reply was that I would go if he sent me but not on my own responsibility. Your moderator sent me, and it has been a real joy and inspiration to

work with that loyal and enthusiastic band of Christians. The result is that the congregation has been moved from the old historic site of Civil War fame to a new site on the road running between Yorktown and Poquoson."

"During the agitation of this proposed change, the different denominations who had been meeting in a mission chapel for a number of years voted unanimously to turn that interest over to the Bethel brethren. Another site was offered in the opposite direction from Big Bethel, but a majority seemed to prefer this site. Your worker canvassed the whole community trying to see all the former members of Bethel to get their wishes."

In Tabb, York County, three miles from Big Bethel, about one-half mile from the Halfway House toward Yorktown, a small community known as Smithville had developed. The public buildings consisted of an elementary school (grades 1-7) and a non-denominational chapel. This area was called Smithville, mainly after a family that had lived in the area for a very long time, but other families named Smith were living here too. One of the Smith families had provided land on Yorktown Road for the building of Smithville Chapel. The people of the community constructed the building and donated the furniture for the interior. Two neighbor ladies, Mrs. Martha Ann Hudgins and Mrs. Ida Taylor, contributed 75¢ each for the purchase of one pew, since church pews at that time only cost \$1.50 per pew.

A leading and respected layman in this community, Edwin Allen Sinclair, (grandfather of Mrs. Carolyn Sinclair Smith) affectionately called Mr. Eddie Sinclair, was the first superintendent of the Chapel Sunday School, which met every Sunday morning. There was no worship service, but occasionally, Rev. A. J. Renforth of Yorktown would hold night meetings. Easter, Children's Day, Christmas, all were important events when the entire community would assemble for the special programs.

Mr. Sinclair was the superintendent for many years. Upon his death, R. P. Hudgins became superintendent. The position of superintendent of a Sunday School was a very responsible office in the rural churches in those days. In addition to being in charge of conducting the services, the superintendent would take care of the building and all the need repairs, see that kerosene was in the oil lamps for the night meetings, and carry split wood to use for fires on the cold days.

Some of the Chapel members were already Bethel members who had attended morning services at the Chapel and afternoon services at Bethel for many years previous. Even those from the Chapel who were not members of Bethel would often attend the afternoon service there in order to have full church worship on the Sabbath. So, the Chapel members readily agreed to become a part of Big Bethel. Thus, a site was found across the road from the Chapel, next to the place where remain the ruins of Charles Parish Episcopal Church, one of the first churches in Virginia. The property belonged to James H. Taylor, already a member of Bethel, who eventually donated the land to the church for a building and a cemetery. At a cost of approximately \$8000 Bethel erected a new building which was dedicated July 17, 1927. At this service Rev. J. Elwood Welsh returned to preach the morning sermon.

Mr. Little concluded his report to the Peninsula Association with: "It has been one of the great joys of my ministerial life to work <sup>with</sup> these brethren. They have worked and prayed and toiled on unselfishly, until they have their reward in this small but neat and comfortable building for the worship of Almighty God. May the Lord's richest blessings descend upon this new interest."

One of the important features of the new church was the baptistry behind the pulpit. In the old church the new members had been baptized in the Poquoson River. A family named Croswell, who lived in Calthrops Neck on the Poquoson, had belonged to Bethel from the earliest days. The baptism of new members for Big Bethel was held in the river in front of this family's home. Bethel members, proud of the conveniences in their new church, gladly invited local Baptist churches to use their new baptistry.

In 1926 when Mr. Little first came to help Bethel, the church called him as pastor. He continued on as pastor for the next four years and conducted services each Sunday at first; then for awhile he held services every other Sunday until he resigned February 1, 1930. Mr. Little lived in Williamsburg, and each Sunday some church member met the train to bring him to Bethel, (Usually Mr. Harper or one of his family would furnish the local transportation.) Mr. Little would spend the Sabbath with different members and go back to Williamsburg by train that night.

It was the pastor's great desire to see Bethel grow, and he devoted his energies toward this end. One of his many activities was having special days during the year. Outstanding was Old Folks Day, when Mr. Little provided flowers to all in attendance past eighty and even brought in a few rocking chairs. On other occasions he stimulated attendance in Sunday School with various awards for perfect attendance.

Mr. Little and the membership shared a fond close relationship. For as long as he lived, even after he retired, he kept an active interest in the Bethel people and their activities, writing to them upon special occasions. The following letter has been treasured over the years by one of Bethel's members and is typical of the interest that Mr. Little maintained in Bethel as long as he lived.

Williamsburg, Virginia

June 15, 1935

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

Ever since your picture with a list of all those honors you have earned appeared in the paper I have intended to write you a note of congratulation and commendation. You deserve them all, but I commend you for earning them. May all those titles of distinction sit easily upon your young brow. And the Lord bless you as you wear them, and you wear them to His name's honor and glory.

I congratulate your father and mother in having two daughters with ambition to be worth something in the world. In a world that is pleasure

mad, it is comforting to find a few who are more concerned about the "things that remain." Some of our young women have forgotten the Divine statement that "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Now that you have won these earthly distinctions, may the Lord crown thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

With sincere congratulations and best wishes, I am,

Your friend and former pastor,

L. Peyton Little

On July 29-30, 1930, Mr. Little reported to the Peninsula Association: "Your worker remained as pastor of Bethel until the third Sunday in February of this year, when his resignation took effect. This pastorate has been one of the most pleasant of all my ministerial career. After failing to report to this association for three consecutive years, Bethel was reorganized, and since that time (1926) they have put back into the denominational treasury \$1555.52 and spent \$13,224.98 on their own local work. They have a modern house of worship and a chapel valued at not less than \$10,000, with a debt of only \$300 on the entire plant; and they hope to pay that off this fall when it comes due."

"Since my resignation I have supplied for Bethel on several special occasions. Your worker assisted in the protracted meeting which resulted in 13 additions by baptism. He had a part in the ordination of deacons and attended a Sunday School picnic where he had a large part on the program at lunch hour."

Today, when inner city churches are constantly being moved out to the suburbs of the city in order to achieve greater expansion, the relocation of a church seems a rather commonplace undertaking. Bethel, however, was different. The church membership had dwindled from sixty-five in 1909 to thirty-five in 1923-26. During these almost seventeen years, the church would gain a few new members, but the losses would seem to keep down the gains. It is true that people outside the immediate Big Bethel community often attended the church services, but they did not unite with the church. A church having such difficulty in winning and retaining members usually folds up, and the members scatter to other churches. As evident of this fact are the remains of Charles Parish Episcopal Church across Yorktown Road from Bethel. Only a name and a monument remain of one of the great churches in early Virginia, before Baptists even came in this area. The miracle is that Bethel survived, for the church might well have ended in the same way with but a name in history books. The membership, however, through the grace of God, were able to hold on until Baptists on the Peninsula sent help. How wonderful that such a remarkable man as Rev. L. P. Little was available in Bethel's hour of need. Remarkable--in that he had a warm and outgoing personality, encompassing everyone he met. In addition, he was a dedicated leader. Bethel members, accustomed to pastors who had to spend so much time on the road traveling from church to church that they were hindered in their leadership of any one church, were often heard to comment, "We never before had a pastor like Brother Little."

Being pastor of Bethel was a part of Mr. Little's associational

work as a paid worker for the Peninsula Association. His task was to bring Bethel back to the point where the church could stand alone. In doing this, he showed the members what a full time pastor could mean to a church, and the membership never forgot.



First Vacation Bible School  
Summer of 1941

## CHAPTER V: A STEADY GROWTH

Since 1930 Bethel has grown continuously under the leadership of spirit-filled pastors with whom our Lord has blessed the church. A young Richmond college student, Rev. Clayton D. Sweet, was secured as supply pastor from February to November 30, 1930; the Rev. N. D. Blackman, who had taught a study course at Emmaus in the spring of 1929, became Bethel's regular pastor along with Emmaus on November 2, 1930. Mr. Blackman was from North Carolina, and this was his first pastorate in Virginia. He and Mrs. Blackman, with their four children, moved to the parsonage at Emmaus. Bethel agreed to pay \$500 toward his salary, and Emmaus would pay \$1150. Worship services at Bethel were held on the first and third Sundays of each month and all fifth Sundays in the year, but only in the mornings. While the membership was still small-126, yet quite often 90 attended Sunday School and church.

For more than half of the next ten years, Bethel grew, but very slowly. Members now recall with regret the inability of the church to maintain the promised salary for the pastor. However, Mr. Blackman reminded us recently, "Everyone was struggling, and the members shared what they had with their pastor." They did not have money, because the membership consisted mainly of farmers who were feeling quite keenly the effects of the economic depression which until the late thirties held the entire country within its tentacles.

Bethel's growth, however, had much stability, for diligent lay leaders assisted Mr. Blackman. R. P. Hudgins continued as Sunday School superintendent, and Charles L. Harper as church clerk and teacher of the Men's Bible Class. The pastor encouraged the organization of Bethel's first WMU with Mrs. R. P. Hudgins, the first president. She was followed by Mrs. R. Frank Smith, who also served many years as the church treasurer. At the beginning of Mr. Blackman's tenure, in order to have an evening service, a Baptist Young People's Union (now BTU) was organized by Miss Elsie Page (Carpenter). Under her continued leadership, this group kept the lights glowing at Bethel on Sunday evenings all during the 1930's, for Bethel's BYPU was quite a thriving and energetic gathering, often surpassing in attendance and activities those in the large Peninsula churches.

During these years also, a very dear missionary friend, Miss Cora Lee Cannon of Durham, North Carolina, never failed to assist Bethel, whenever invited. She first came to Bethel in the spring of 1929 on the same occasion in which Mr. Blackman first came to Emmaus. After that she frequently helped in study courses or revival meetings, and she always referred to the Bethel members as her "Bethelonians."

On August 18, 1940, Bethel celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary. Former pastors were in attendance, in particular, Dr. J. Elwood Welsh, who preached at both morning and evening services. The years had really made a change in the young ministerial students of 1909-1911. On this exciting occasion, he was even more outstanding than in 1927, when he preached the dedication sermon.

Yet October 13, 1940, was a much greater memorable day. At the close of the morning service, a special meeting was held, and 21 members pledged to tithe so that Bethel could have a pastor for full time. This would be the first time since the turn of the century or perhaps even in all of Bethel's history that a pastor would live on the field and devote his entire energies to leadership of the church. The following tithers were listed in this order in the church minutes: Walter D. White, W. T. Page, J. C. Mitchell, A. J. Ponton, Jr., Walter Mackey, Richard Holland, B. E. Watson, F. Thruston, Mrs. Richard Holland, Mrs. Stewart Jones, Miss Frances C. Smith, Mrs. A. J. Ponton, Jr., Mrs. Elsie Page Carpenter, Mrs. Ida Taylor, Mrs. J. C. Mitchell, Mrs. C. G. Smith, Conway Bloxton, Roy Mitchell, Mrs. Walter D. White, Mrs. Grace Soles, Miss Elizabeth Page.. Some of these were tithers already, but this was the first time that they had dedicated themselves openly to give one-tenth to the Lord.

In 1941, Rev. N. D. Blackman resigned to accept the pastorate of a group of churches in the Appomattox Association. In his letter of resignation, the pastor stated that "during the 30's the progress of Bethel had not been as great as we had hoped for, yet we thank God for all of his many blessings. We have received 84 into the fellowship of the church, and total contributions have amounted to more than \$13,000. Your pastor is in full accord with your desire for fulltime preaching and is of the opinion that it would be best for a new pastor to come on the field."

In a letter to Bethel, written after he had left, Mr. Blackman continued: "From November 1, 1930 to March 31, 1941, it was my good fortune to serve you as pastor. These were among the happiest years of my life. I want to take this opportunity of thanking you for everything you have done to contribute to that happiness. Any preacher would count it a joy to serve such true and faithful and loyal people." The Bethel membership felt a similar admiration for their beloved pastor of more than ten years.

Bethel continues to revere Mr. Blackman who, now retired, lives with his wife at Buckroe, for he strengthened the organization of the church in keeping with the principles of Southern Baptists, at a time when Bethel needed a stable leadership. In his retirement he has also served other Peninsula churches as interim pastor, especially the South York Baptist Church, which, like Emmaus, originated as a part of Bethel. Surely our Heavenly Father was watching over the Peninsula when Rev. N. D. Blackman came with his family to Virginia.

On June 15, 1941, Bethel extended Rev. Harvey Nichols of Lynchburg a call as fulltime pastor. This was Mr. Nichols' first pastorate since he had just graduated from Southern Seminary in May. He was only twenty-three years old, having completed his undergraduate studies in three years, but being young did not hinder him from working diligently. Rather, he led Bethel in having the first Vacation Bible School that very summer. He was really quite busy, for he was to be married at the end of the summer. Thus, he became the second pastor to bring a bride to Bethel. With this in mind, Bethel proceeded to erect a pastoriūm at once, and Mr. Nichols with his bride of a few months moved into the new dwelling in November, 1941.

The church at this time began providing bus transportation for all children and adults who wished to attend morning services. This service continued for almost 20 years through the generosity of a faithful layman,

Harry Taylor, who drove and furnished the bus.

On December 19, 1943, in the midst of World War II, like many other churches, Bethel held a special service dedicating a Service Flag and honoring those of the membership serving in the Armed Forces at that time, who were: S. T. Carpenter, William Catlin, Carl Hautz, Robert J. Hudgins, Roy Mitchell, Nicholas J. Proferes, Robert Sweat, Ned Tabb, Vane Thomas, and Garland Wilson. Bethel was blessed in that while many of these men saw active duty, they all returned to their families after the war. Furthermore, Bethel members had reason to rejoice again during the years following the great war. In both the Korean War and the conflict with Vietnam, the men from our church, who were involved, all returned home safely. The church, however, was affected by the wars because new communities sprang up from the expansion of work opportunities on the Peninsula and from the growth of the military bases here. Also, women became more involved in places of church leadership, when men were either away at war or were working long hours in the shipyards.

Since World War II, those service personnel and their families, assigned to the Peninsula Air Force, Army, or Navy Bases, who found their way to our church, have made many contributions to Bethel. Some of the church's most dedicated leaders have been and continue to be from these military families, who live either in the surrounding communities of the church or in the Capehart Housing Development which began to locate in York County in 1960. Several of these members have been chosen deacons; a few have even been ordained to the deaconship while at Bethel. Many have been active as choir members, Sunday School teachers and youth leaders and continue in these capacities, serving the church faithfully. Fellowship with these families, who have traveled extensively, has truly enriched the lives of all of the church membership. One family, in particular, that of Major Howard Bailey, remained in the area for a few years after his retirement. His wife, Mary Bailey, was the first fulltime paid church secretary that Bethel had. Howard, who served the church in many capacities, was instrumental in Bethel's calling our most recent pastor, Rev. Edsel West.

Rev. Harvey Nichols resigned in 1945 to become pastor at Grundy and for almost thirty years now has been pastor of a church in Falls Church. In a letter of resolutions, Bethel expressed sincere appreciation to him and his wife for their leadership, stating that the church had experienced an unusual growth numerically, financially, and spiritually. Mr. Nichols is remembered with much love for his visitation and concern over each member of Bethel.

At the regular business meeting in July, 1945, Bethel called Rev. Robert L. Murphy, a former resident of Newport News, who had graduated from the Southern Seminary only the month before. Although young, Mr. Murphy had already been pastor of a church during his years at the seminary. The parents of both pastor and wife (Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Murphy, and Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Gray) became active members of Bethel, and Rev. Robert Murphy is an uncle of one of our present deacons, W. T. Davis.

Bethel began to broaden in new fields under Mr. Murphy's leadership, especially in the young people's organizations. Mr. Murphy would use his car for transporting the youth to the church meetings, usually without any reimbursement. This was the first time that Bethel really concentrated

on winning the young people and helping them mature in their Christian experience. The pastor's wife, a graduate of WMU Training School, was also a leader in the church organizations, as well as church organist. From 1945 to 1948, over and above the regular budget, Bethel purchased new pews for the main auditorium, floor covering, and an organ, and equipped the Chapel across the road for a social hall. The budget for the year 1945-46 was \$3,026; almost 50% went to missions. Church membership increased over one-third during the ministry of Mr. Murphy.

In November, 1948, Rev. Robert Murphy resigned to accept a call to Fox Hall in Norfolk and in more recent years has been the pastor of churches in Florida and Georgia. Again Bethel offered resolutions expressing warm regard and sincere gratitude to both pastor and wife for the growth of the church, especially for the pastor's work among the young people. During these years the entire church had really admired the Murphy's adorable little daughter, Anne Gray. In 1974 those members who still remembered Rev. and Mrs. Murphy were extremely saddened by Anne Gray's sudden death.

Bethel extended a call to Rev. Harold L. Crute in February, 1949. Mr. Crute, who had already been pastor of a few churches before coming to Bethel, had answered the call to the ministry after the death of his brother. Although Mr. Crute, when very young, had felt the Spirit's call to the ministry, he had held back because his brother had decided to enter the ministry. The family finances were such that only one son was able to go. Then, one day his brother, while standing in a doorway waiting for an electrical storm to pass, was struck by lightning and killed instantly. Hesitating no longer, Mr. Crute worked his way through both college and seminary, even working in the coal mines in West Virginia to get the funds necessary for his education.

The new pastor was concerned that Bethel's Sunday School meet the standards set up by Southern Baptists. So, in 1949 he led the church in sponsoring an enlargement program of the Sunday School. Following this, six new classes were added to the Sunday School. The Junior and Intermediate Departments were moved across the road to the church annex, formerly the Chapel. In 1950 due to the increased growth, Bethel began to build a two-story brick educational building at the rear of the church, at a cost of \$49,000. Ground-breaking services were held on January 20, 1952, and a goal of 200 in Sunday School was met.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Crute liked music, and Mrs. Crute became the director of the Bethel choir. Today, their son, Robert Louis Crute, who was four years old when the Crutes came to Bethel, is in fulltime Christian service as minister of music in a church in Tidewater. He has been very gracious to Bethel by appearing as soloist over several occasions.

Mr. Crute resigned to accept a pastorate at Bloxom in August, 1952, and over the years he has served churches in Virginia. Today, he is pastor of Backstone Baptist Church. In the resolutions praising the Crutes, the church stated that "we had experienced growth and that, furthermore, the educational building, completed November 1, 1952, stands as a monument to Brother Crute for his untiring efforts and loyal support during our building program."

Doctor Robert E. Connely, a chaplain stationed at Fort Eustis, became

the next pastor of Bethel and began his ministry in February, 1953. Since World War II was so fresh in the memories of the people, they readily identified with Mr. Connely when he, having seen combat duty in the war, often related his many varied experiences. On September 13 of his first year at Bethel, the new educational building was dedicated. Mr. Crute returned to preach the morning sermon, and the interim pastor, Rev. C. E. Anderson of Phoebus was also present.

For the next six years Bethel continued to grow as always, slowly but steadily. The church letter to the Peninsula Association in 1959 stated that Bethel's membership was 409 and that the church budget was \$20,632, of which almost one-third had been assigned to missions. The church annex building (Smithville Chapel) had been moved in 1955 from across the road to be placed behind the educational building to take care of the overflow in the Sunday School more easily. The heavy traffic on Yorktown Road, sometimes very fast, had been keeping children from crossing the highway to get to their Sunday School classes.

Over the years members have donated gifts to help in the furnishings of the church or have given large love offerings to missions, etc., in appreciation for our Lord's blessings to them. Two examples stand out. Mrs. Rosalyn Hudgins gave the enclosure for the choir loft in memory of her mother, Mrs. Alma Tabb, who was a faithful member of Bethel and WMU president. Much earlier, another faithful and dedicated member, Mrs. George L. Smith, Sr., had given a special Bible for the pulpit. She had secured this Bible through the help of Mr. Little before his death at his home in Williamsburg, March 31, 1939.

Rev. and Mrs. Robert Connely remained at Bethel for seven years. Mrs. Connely, who was very active in the work, sang in the choir and often taught adult study classes. She said that at one of their former churches, Mr. Connely was known as a teaching preacher while she was known as a preaching teacher. This characterization continued at Bethel, and members today still recall their excellent Bible instruction and refer to their publications.

In April, 1960, Mr. Connely read his resignation to be effective the last of October when he would retire from the ministry and settle in Atlanta, Georgia. "May I express the great joy it has been to serve you at Bethel. Both Mrs. Connely and I are of one mind that this has been the most enjoyable pastorate we have held in the 37 years of service for the Master. The friendships we have here are among the richest, and the membership, as a whole, are the finest. We shall ever thank God for allowing us to come your way." In turn, Bethel expressed utmost appreciation for the pastor through resolutions declaring that "our faith has been deepened and our spiritual strength increased because of the prayerful ministry of Rev. and Mrs. R. E. Connely." The Connelys still live in Atlanta, but far from being inactive as retired people, they continue to serve the Lord whenever and wherever He calls. They even traveled to England this past year-1977.

Bethel extended a call to Rev. Robert Estes of Rocky Mount, Virginia, in November 1960. Both Mr. Estes and his uncle had previously held revivals at Bethel, and his mother and father, who lived in the area, were active members. Mr. Estes was very evangelistic, and attendance at the

services began to increase almost immediately. For the next summer, it was necessary to hold two worship services on Sunday mornings to provide for the growth.

Three new ventures at this time show the missionary spirit of Bethel under the pastor's leadership. First, in January 1962, Bethel applied for and was given the sponsorship of a Cuban refugee family, Roberto Alonso, wife and child, who stayed in the community for more than a year. Then, the church council recommended that Bethel assist in services at the Patrick Henry Hospital on Thursday afternoons. This practice continues to the present (1978), but now under the sponsorship of the WMU. Bethel ladies, filled with compassion and concern, coordinated by Mrs. Grace Soles, go every Thursday, except the fifth Thursday, to bring the disabled to a worship service where they may hear a message from a Peninsula pastor. The WMU women also administer to the needs of patients at other Peninsula nursing homes and at the Baptist Home.

During the summer and fall of 1963, the third venture was to sponsor a new mission on Route 134 (Hampton Highway), about six miles away. Twenty-seven Bethel members volunteered to receive letters of dismission to start a new mission. A building was erected as soon as possible; a pastor was called with some financial assistance from Bethel, and South York Baptist Church came into existence, the third church to be started by Bethel. Growth of South York was such that by the summer of 1964, the church had assumed full financial support.

By the middle of 1963, attendance at Bethel had become so great that parking facilities were limited even if the existing building could be enlarged. Two years before, in 1961, the church had purchased seven and one-half acres of land directly across the road, from Robert P. Hudgins, the house and yard of the home of his mother and father. The church appointed W. T. Covington to be chairman of a building committee to proceed with drawing up plans for a new church building, which were approved at a business meeting in July, 1964. For the next year, Mr. Covington spent long hours in diligent concentration to every detail in getting the new building started and eventually completed. An old magnolia tree in the Hudgins yard was left standing at the front of the church, not only as a reminder of the love and dedication which the Hudgins family had felt for Bethel but also as a symbol of the history of this area.

The same month that Bethel launched a building program was also the time when the pastor felt led of the Spirit to return to the Southwestern Seminary (Texas) to obtain the degree of Master of Theology with emphasis in Evangelism, planning to enter fulltime evangelistic work. Bethel accepted with humility this complete dedication of Mr. Estes and expressed a deep appreciation for his "Spirit-directed ministry," noting that our church has grown in every sphere of influence under his leadership. While the members felt sadness at parting with their young pastor and his family, they praised him for his readiness to follow our Lord's direction in such a far-reaching work.

Although Bethel had sponsored three missions, which later became churches, for years no person had become educated with the idea of going into fulltime service for the Lord. The first church clerk in 1840, Thomas Crandol, had become a licensed preacher, but no one had gone to

college with this in mind. Finally, in 1958, over a century later, Miss Shirley Bell Taylor (Mrs. Duane Saylor), a former organist at Bethel, graduated from the seminary at Louisville, Kentucky, and became the first lay member to go officially into fulltime Christian service. (She presently is the organist and music director in one of the Peninsula churches.) The first trained minister to go out from Bethel in all of the church's history was Robert C. Emerson, who was licensed to preach in 1959 and was ordained September 8, 1963. Now, in 1964, two other men answered the call to go into fulltime ministerial service and to go to college to prepare themselves even though they were older men with families. Licensed to preach at the same time that our pastor, Mr. Estes, answered the call to evangelistic work, were Robert (Bob) Baker and Lester Boyd.

Reverend N. D. Blackman, being retired, returned to be interim pastor until Bethel could fill the vacancy created by Mr. Estes' resignation. The church was fortunate, however, to find a pastor only two months later. In November, 1964, Rev. David C. Anderson accepted the call to come to Bethel. This would be the fourth pastorate he had served in the Peninsula Association since first coming to Virginia in 1939.

Bethel's building program became one of the first needs which received the attention of the new pastor. Because Mr. Covington had been working on the program, the church was ready. As a result, construction began in April, 1965, for the building of a sanctuary to accommodate 600 people and for an educational building to care for a fully departmentalized Sunday School of 750 in attendance. The overall cost of these units was approximately \$206,450. Bethel had come a long way from the one-room buildings used for the first eighty-seven years. The membership in 1964 had grown to 521, and the church budget for that year was \$52,000, of which forty percent was given to missions.

As indicated before, the entire Peninsula had grown following World War II. The Newport News Shipyard and NASA at Langley Field, with increased opportunities for employment, had caused people to establish permanent homes in this area, while the military families were more temporary residents. York County was greatly affected because people coming to Tidewater preferred to locate in a rural community and commute to work, since now the highways were good and every family owned at least one car. Farming land around Bethel began to disappear, as housing developments spread. As the county grew, so the church was growing. Today, the Tabb or Bethel district of York County continues to become more and more populated. The challenge to our church thus becomes ever bigger. Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (John 3:35)

## CHAPTER VI: THE NEW BUILDING--BETHEL'S SIXTH

On October 15, 1965, the Bethel membership celebrated the 125 years that their church as a constituted church had been in existence. At the same time an open house was held for all of the current and former Bethel members and their friends. The membership had moved into the new sanctuary only a few weeks before the eventful day, making this the sixth regular church building.

Former pastors--Blackman, Connely, Crute, Estes, Nichols, Sweet--and their families attended, some from many miles away. Peninsula pastors from nearby churches also attended one or more services. All had parts on the program, while Robert Louis Crute was the guest soloist.

The services extended for a whole day with dinner provided by the church. Members from far and near attended at least one of the three services. The beauty of the new sanctuary filled everyone with joy and pride. The fact that all of the church furnishings had been donated by individual members, often in memory of loved ones, increased the membership's feelings of personal involvement. (The cushions for the pews were given later by Mrs. Susan Newton in memory of her husband, Willie Newton, who, before his death, had often spoken about the hard pews in the church.) On this day of dedication, the Bethel membership experienced a quickening of the Spirit and with deep gratitude gave praise to God for His many blessings to Big Bethel down through the years.

Foremost among the blessings was the sending of Rev. David Anderson to guide Bethel at this particular time. In addition to the building program, Mr. Anderson expanded the members' vision of the mission fields. He emphasized the need for giving to all three mission offerings, but mainly Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, and Bethel responded as never before. Also, during his pastorate, Bethel sponsored a fourth church--Menchville Baptist in Newport News--which was constituted May 2, 1969. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson worked together: she later was appointed a home missionary, for a time in charge of Friendship House, a mission field in Newport News.

During the next five years Bethel continued to increase in membership and in giving. By the year 1970-71 the budget was \$75,400, and the membership was approximately 600. In November, 1967, the church building across Yorktown Road that Mr. Little had loved (Bethel's fifth building), was sold for \$40,000. First used for a private school (Yorkshire Academy), it is now the Christian Life Church (1977). Then, in August, 1968, the parsonage was sold for \$16,500, since the pastor preferred a housing allotment. The membership agreed to this sale because the parsonage needed repairs, and the church could in this way help their pastor obtain a retirement home in Poquoson.

Over these years the church felt led to give greater attention to the youth at Bethel. In the summer of 1969, Mark Pullen, who had been ordained in Bethel for fulltime pastoral ministry and who had just finished his seminary education, was employed with his wife, Nancy Call Pullen, to conduct a special youth program. (She is the daughter of one of Bethel's deacons.

Mark, who is now (1978) pastor of a church in Maryland has spoken often at Bethel and even recently was the evangelist in a revival at Bethel.) Other youth leaders have been Ed Miller in 1970, Lofton Delgado in 1971, and Burt Skinner in 1972. On July 12, 1972, the church voted to call a young couple, Wayne and Dawn Bennett from North Carolina to work fulltime with the youth. Wayne, an ordained minister, had graduated in June from Wheaton College and had come to Bethel when the Radiant Tidings Evangelistic Group held a revival. He would serve as associate pastor in charge of youth while Dawn, who was talented in music, would direct the youth choir.

Another program initiated under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson was Family Night. On Wednesday of each week from five-thirty on, Bethel people were quite busy. First, they had supper at a minimal cost; then, from 6:30 to 8:30 many organizations and choirs would meet while the regular prayer meeting began at 7:30. The Wednesday evening schedule continues with the many activities, except for the supper, which the church voted in 1974 to discontinue unless for special occasions.

On July 26, 1970, Reverend David Anderson read his resignation to accept a call to Union Baptist Church, Gloucester, effective September 10. Having once before been pastor of this church, Mr. Anderson was now returning. The Bethel church bulletin for August 2 carried the following statement:

"The deacons of Bethel, like other members, feel a distinct sense of personal loss on this occasion. They believe, however, that Jesus Christ, the Head of His churches, has led Brother Anderson in this matter and ask, therefore, that we all join in prayer for God's continuing guidance and blessing upon us all as we seek to follow the will of our living Lord."

Resolutions were sent to the Union Baptist Church commending Reverend and Mrs. Anderson to their new charge and expressing gratitude and praise for "the prayerful ministry of our pastor and his wife." In the September 6 church bulletin, Mr. Anderson wrote, "Our hearts are over-flowing with gratitude for the expressions of love and appreciation tendered us at the farewell reception last Sunday. We will always cherish the memories of these years of service and fellowship at Bethel....May our Lord reward you bountifully for the joy you have brought us."

Meanwhile, Bethel appointed a pulpit committee and called Reverend Robert Estes to be the interim pastor. Since Mr. Estes at that time was the director of IMPACT, an evangelistic organization sponsored by the Peninsula Baptist Association, he was able to accept the call, to the great joy of the members who have always had a special feeling for both Mr. Estes and his wife, Fay, and for their four children. Before the new pastor was found, however, Mr. Estes had accepted a call to the Triangle Baptist Church at Quantico, Virginia. At present he is pastor of a church in North Carolina.

In June, 1971, Reverend Edsel Lee West of Lake City, Tennessee, accepted the call to be Bethel's pastor and preached his first sermon on July 18. The membership gave praise to our Lord for his clear direction in their choice for pastor. Earlier, the pulpit committee had distributed a fact summary, a part of which is quoted:

"Reverend Edsel Lee West will appear in our pulpit on April 25, 1971, for both the morning and evening services. The pulpit committee unanimously recommends him to you as we prayerfully seek God's man for Bethel....Rev. West was born in Oneida, Tennessee, in 1940....He attended the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and received a B.D. degree in 1964. ....He was converted by Jesus Christ in 1953 and began preaching in 1954. He was ordained to the ministry in 1955 and was very busy preaching in various churches and conducting revivals during his high school and college days. ....In 1967, he was called to his third pastorate, the Main Street Baptist Church in Lake City, Tennessee.

"We are sure that you will easily identify with Reverend Edsel West and his family during their visit with us and will want to meet them first hand. In the meantime, any member of the pulpit committee will be glad to answer your questions. Our interview with Reverend and Mrs. West was in itself a spiritual experience."

Mr. West's family consisted of, besides his wife, a son, Greg, and a daughter, Tammy. Greg, an athlete, superior in track, graduated from Tabb High School in 1977 and is a student at Carson Newman. Tammy has completed the tenth grade at Tabb. Like her mother, she has been active in the music program at Bethel, both as a pianist and as a soloist.

From 1971 on, Bethel has reached out and developed in many new areas of work for our Lord, but always the main emphasis has been on Bethel's becoming a church of love and friendship. Always our goal has been to achieve a happy and busy church family, witnessing for our Lord. In the last week of 1974, Bethel sent Rev. and Mrs. West to the Holy Land in appreciation of his dedicated and spirit-filled ministry in helping our membership to continue to come closer to one another in Christian fellowship. He also helped the church family to continue to expand in a greater testimony of God's love and gift of salvation to all who believe.

Following 1965, Bethel has held annual homecomings on the third Sunday in October. Former pastors, or former members who are now ministers who have spoken at these services are the following: Rev. N. D. Blackman, and Rev. Robert C. Emerson-1966; Rev. Robert L. Murphy-1967; Rev. Robert Estes-1970; Rev. Lester Boyd-1971; Rev. Dick Ellis and Rev. David Anderson-1972; Rev. Mark Pullen-1973; Rev. Robert L. Murphy-1974; and Rev. Harvey Nichols, the first fulltime pastor for Bethel in the twentieth century, came back on the 135th anniversary of Bethel-1975. Each time there have been two services, morning and afternoon, with dinner provided at the church. Many of the former members had often expressed a desire to hear the present Bethel pastor. As a result, in 1976 Mr. West preached at the morning service, and former pastor, David Anderson, delivered the sermon for the afternoon. The day was an uplifting experience for all who attended, just as all the homecomings have been.

This past year, 1977, Rev. Harold Crute returned to preach at both services while his son, Robert, now Bob, came in the afternoon as a soloist. Also, at this service those members who had belonged to Bethel for almost forty consecutive years or more were recognized. Those who were present for the occasion received flowers, because 1977 marked the fiftieth year that our church had been located on Yorktown Road. Only thirty long-

standing members were still living, and twelve of these were present: Mrs. Elsie Carpenter, Richard Holland, Mrs. Richard Holland, Mrs. Roselyn Hudgins, Mrs. Lucille Mitchell, Roy Mitchell, Rodgers Smith, Mrs. Rodgers Smith, Mrs. Grace Soles, Mrs. Letty Sweat, Mrs. Molly Taylor, and Mrs. Ruby Taylor. Two other members would have been present but are now residing in nursing homes--Charles L. Harper and Mrs. Flossie Hudgins.



First Youth Pastor  
at Bethel  
Rev. Wayne Bennett  
and wife, Dawn,  
and son, Jonathan



Present Youth Pastor at Bethel  
Paul Rogers, and wife, Beth

## CHAPTER VII: THROUGH FAITH TOWARD HIGHER GROUND

"I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining ev'ry day, Still praying as I onward bound, 'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.'"

Music has always been an integral part of the Bethel church life, and the words of the above hymn represent what the Bethel membership is trying to do in the seventies. Daily, yearly, we want to do more for our Lord who has done so much for us. For God has blessed Bethel in material ways and in numerous lay leaders who are willing to use their talents in service for Him.

It was a higher ground for Bethel in 1972 when Mrs. Dawn Bennett, wife of the youth pastor, developed a youth choir of forty voices strong as a permanent part of the church activities. The church purchased an amplifying system, and the choir became a constant delight to everyone. In demand by many churches on the Peninsula, the youth choir even traveled to distant parts of Virginia and North Carolina, singing in a number of churches in those areas.

Visitors to Bethel have often commented on the number of talented musicians, both vocal and instrumental, among the members today. Over the years some of the outstanding pianists/organists were: Mrs. Eula Savage, Mrs. Lucille Mitchell, Mrs. Marianne Murphy, Mrs. Shirley T. Saylor, Mrs. Nancy P. Emerson, Mrs. Brenda P. Sechrist. More recently, the faithful and accomplished pianist/organist is Mrs. Becky Babb, while the youth pianist has been Timmy Rowe. Just before going off to college in the fall of 1977, Timmy gave a mini-concert on the piano, and the church honored him in a special way for his faithfulness all during his high school years. Mrs. Beth Rogers and Tammy West were the next pianists.

Another member honored in 1977 for faithful service was Mr. Ronald Pollock, who had served as church song leader longer than any other in all of Bethel's history--more than twelve years. In 1976 under his direction, the Adult Choir, along with the Youth Choir, made a record of some of their most beautiful renditions. Under the title of "The King is Coming," the record has selections from both choirs on one side and selections from the ladies' trio on the other side. On the outside cover, an explanation of the meaning of music at Bethel was placed. Following are several quotes from the explanation:

"At Bethel Church the halls are alive with the music of one or the other of its musical groups as they rehearse for an offering of talent unto the Lord."

"Our Adult Choir, under the direction of Mr. Ronald Pollock, is made up of men and women of all ages. The only requirement for membership is that you love the Lord and thrill to sounds of music. Together, we lift our voices in blended adoration seeking not so much a perfect harmony of sound as a perfect union of spirit with our Lord. What joy to sing the song of the Soul set free in Jesus Christ."

"Melodious harmony fills the air and lingers in the hearts of all who hear our Ladies Trio. Composed of Mrs. Jean Bradshaw, Mrs. Dawn Bennett, and Mrs. Hannah West (the pastor's wife), this dedicated group has been singing together for four years. They have achieved a sound so harmonious to the ear that one could listen on and on as they delight the soul of the listener. This group, like the Youth Choir, has sung in many Peninsula Churches as well as for other groups. It is their desire that you worship as they sing."

The Bethel Church family is indeed appreciative of the leadership in music of Mr. Pollock, who has remained an active member of the adult choir giving depth to the men's voices. During the worship services, the stirring music of the choir, now led by Mr. Paul Rogers, indicates the time spent in preparation. It also reminds us of the extent that the choir has grown over the years. For a long time after the church located on Yorktown Road, the only soloists were Mrs. Sallie Smith and Mrs. Flossie Hudgins. Somewhat later, Mrs. Etheline Hudgins was the main soloist. During the thirties, only one man ventured into the choir regularly, Mr. W. T. Page, who sang bass. However, much of the choir's growth is due to the perseverance of Mrs. Anne Davis, who started in the choir as a very young girl and is still active.

Bethel reached a new height with the acquisition of the buses. In 1972 the church purchased and equipped two buses for transporting people to Sunday School and morning worship hour. So began again a ministry which had ceased a few years before. Different members have supervised the transportation, but the main and faithful driver since 1972 has been Mrs. Anne Taylor, while Mr. Charlie Holt has kept the buses going through his maintenance of them. Today, the buses are used equally as much for enabling youth to attend many church-related activities. In addition to the buses, a former deacon, Lawrence Beamer, donated a station wagon for transporting our youth to camps and for other similar church social events.

When Mr. West came to Bethel, the church had to rent housing for the pastor, since the parsonage had been sold. At the August, 1972, church business meeting, three members, Rodgers and Elizabeth Smith and Elsie P. Carpenter, presented the church with a deed for 1.61 acres of waterfront property to be used as a site for a parsonage for Bethel. The gift was in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Thomas Page, and husband, Samuel Tilden Carpenter. These three had been active members of Bethel during their lifetime, with Mrs. Page still attending regularly when she passed away at the age of ninety-three.

At a cost of \$48,200, Bethel erected the new parsonage, and Mr. West, with his family, moved in on November 1, 1973. The funds derived from the sale of the fifth church across Yorktown Road, with accumulated interest, paid for the new parsonage. The spending of the funds in this way gave the members a feeling of great thankfulness in that the original investment in the first Big Bethel Church on Yorktown Road would continue in meaningful service. Located in a wooded section on the water, the Bethel pastorum is indeed lovely, and we are extremely proud that we were able to build it. A conservative assessment, recently, placed the value of the parsonage, building and property, at \$85,000.

Many other undertakings during the years 1971-1977 have proven to be

successful. With Robert Ambrose as leader, the children's worship service on Sunday mornings for four and five year olds was revived and continues to meet. Mr. Ambrose has also been instrumental in causing the Bethel library to be enlarged in number of books and to begin in active circulation among the membership. The WMU, having returned to circle meetings, both daytime and night, is reaching more of the women. All of the youth organizations, especially the RA's, under the direction of W. T. Davis, have participated in continued activities throughout each year. The church provides weekly Bible study and fellowship for the youth, and many of the young people attend the summer camps. Since 1941 the Vacation Bible Schools, sponsored every year, have been extremely meaningful and far-reaching. Conducted in the past in June, they have been held more recently in August. For many years the ladies of the church have operated a nursery during the two services on Sunday and during the weekly prayer meeting on Wednesday. Today, both men and women sign up well in advance for a particular time to keep the nursery so that mothers may have an opportunity for more devout worship, but over the years the leader in charge has generally been Mrs. Barbara Slaughter.

Each year, in cooperation with the church program advanced by Southern Baptists, Bethel has held men's day in January. On these days the men of the church begin the day with breakfast cooked by the men, followed by a lay speaker. While the speaker changes from year to year, the head cook, Mr. Bill Dudley, stays the same. The men, also, conduct the entire worship services for the rest of the day. These services have really been mountaintop experiences for all of the Bethel family, comparable to the revivals which the church continues to conduct yearly.

One of the most moving men's day occurred in 1975, when Jack Whaley, a former deacon and Sunday School teacher, made his last appearance in Bethel. Jack, suffering from leukemia, came from a sick bed to give his testimony and witness and to praise his Lord. This action was typical of Jack, who never missed an opportunity to speak out for Jesus, our Saviour. Although Jack was called home to glory shortly thereafter, the church will long remember his personality and feel his influence.

Bethel has more than one hundred members each week participating in some leadership office connected with the Sunday School or Training Union, such as teachers, helpers, secretaries, etc. The church also sponsors many social events and sports as a part of the recreation program. Thus, the total church program attempts to enlist and encourage all members to have a part in work for our Lord and in fellowship with one another.

In the summer of 1976, Mr. Wayne Bennett decided to go to the Baptist Seminary at Wake Forest to get his advance degree for the ministry. While the Bethel membership regretted parting with Wayne, Dawn, and little Jonathan, the church accepted his decision with thanksgiving that the Lord had blessed us with the services of the Bennetts at this time. With much love and praise for the work of this couple, the Bethel family gladly agreed to help Wayne financially with his education, which he completed in December, 1977. He and Dawn have accepted a call to West Albemarle Baptist Church in Albemarle, N. C. They also have an addition to the family, Joy Elizabeth.

Wayne and Dawn returned to Bethel recently to express appreciation

for all that the church had done to help them. In turn, the Bethel family responded with love and good wishes to the Bennetts in their new undertaking. Since beginning their ministry at West Albemarle, that church has elected Mrs. Dawn Bennett the minister of music.

For five months in 1976-77, Bethel had no paid staff member to work with the youth. During this time, Mrs. Phyllis Hunt very ably and faithfully conducted the youth choir so that the members would continue to grow in their music. In April, 1977, following a short trial period, Paul Rogers was called to become Bethel's youth/music minister.

Paul grew up in Harlingen, Texas, but after marriage, moved to Memphis, Tennessee, for employment. While in Memphis, two important events happened to the Rogers family. Their son, Scott was born, and in the Baptist church which they joined, Paul was chosen to be the coordinator of youth activities. Later, through his church associations and his liking to work with young people, he was employed to come to the Peninsula to be in charge of activities at Harvest Place in Newport News. Even though Harvest Place was soon having monetary difficulties, our Lord provided for the Rogers family, and they realize that He was definitely guiding them into His work. After first living with acquaintances, they eventually found a place to live at Tabb, and then Bethel found this young couple.

Once again our Heavenly Father's love and guidance in caring for His children is evident. Romans 8:28 states: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." The Bethel youth/music committee had been for months looking for a youth/music minister, and all the time our Lord was leading one to us.

Beginning 1972, Bethel has had five choirs: Adult, Youth, Junior, Primary, and Cherub. The last three are directed by lay members while Mr. Rogers directs the others. In addition he has formed a youth choral group of twelve members called "Daybreak." In 1977 December 2 and 3 were exciting days for the Bethel young people when the youth choir presented a cantata, HERE COMES THE SON, in the auditorium of Tabb High School. In the church bulletin for December 4, 1977, Paul spoke for the entire church when he wrote:

"Magnificent is the word for the week. And that describes the two presentations fo HERE COMES THE SON. Everyone involved is to be congratulated for a superb job. The Lord blesses our efforts, and I know He used the message and impact to speak to many who came. Thanks to cast, chorus, tech crew, and especially to the parents of everyone involved. God bless you all."

While Mr. Rogers has been directing the choirs toward achieving new heights in the church music and working with the youth of the church, his wife, Beth, has been busy organizing a senior citizen group. The work is progressing, but it probably will take longer to reach everyone due to the still somewhat rural area which Bethel serves. However, the goal of our church is to provide for the needs of all of our members.

In the fall of 1976 the church voted to build an addition to the

Sunday School section of the church. Although the present building was built to accomodate 750 if every bit of space was used (such as the library and rooms at the back of the sanctuary), the rooms and halls were quite crowded when attendance surpassed 400. Robert N. Parker was appointed chairman of a committee to proceed with the new building program at once. Accordingly, the church awarded a contract in March, 1977, to build the needed Sunday School class rooms at a cost of \$BB,000. This new addition was occupied one week before the start of the new Sunday School year in October, 1977.

When the Chapel was moved across Yorktown Road in 1955 to the rear of the fifth building of Big Bethel Church, the property on which the Chapel had stood was left vacant. This land was now owned by Mr. and Mrs. T. D. Taylor. In 1965 after Bethel built the sixth sanctuary, the church had only one entrance or exit to get to the church grounds. The Taylors, in December, 1977, gave the church a deed for enough of their property to make, with the Chapel property, a driveway on the west side of the church. In this way, Bethel will eventually have an entrance/exit on each side, and traffic will then flow more easily. Again, as in all of Bethel's history, her people share such as they have with their church.

Today, in 1978, Bethel continues to reach out and to administer to the needs of people living in the Tabb and surrounding communities. In January, the church clerk, Mr. Leon Rowe, reported that the church had a resident membership of 820, a non-resident membership of 94, making a total of 914. Bethel now has a paid staff of six, including the janitor and custodian. Every month the church sends to each Bethel family a pamphlet called "The Bethel Lamplighter" in which the church's special activities are emphasized and a prayer list is given. At the last election of deacons, the church initiated a plan whereby the deacon board would be expanded from 12 in number to 15 by 1979; in this way a closer touch with all of the members could be maintained.

The budget for the year 1977-78 was the largest ever--\$145,190, with 27% of this amount budgeted for world missions. As the needs arise, additional amounts are set aside in the budget for local missions; this year the amount needed was \$2,400. Bethel members contribute all during the year to the unified budget in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program, and only three times a year does the church aim to participate in a special offering over and above the regular budget. Formerly sponsored solely by the WMU, these offerings, Home Missions in March, State Missions in September, and Foreign Missions in December, are now a part of the total church program of giving. Christmas, 1976, was a glowing experience when Bethel gave \$7,800 for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, the greatest amount in mission offering the church has ever given. This past year Bethel gave \$6,900 at Christmas. In other financial matters, the debt of over \$200,000, incurred in 1965 when the present building was constructed, will be paid off in 1980.

In September, 1977, Bethel began a new ministry. For the first time, a Nursery School was started at the church. Mrs. Betsy Mitchell, the founder and teacher, reported that she had a class of thirteen. As a result of this ministry, the parents of some of the pupils who were new to Bethel have already become a part of the church family.

Other new ministries are continuously developing and Bethel, as

always, answers the challenge. The Baptist Foreign Mission Board has been seeking volunteer masonry workers to go in the summer of 1978 to an area in South America near Guatemala City to rebuild a section that was destroyed in a recent disaster. A member of Bethel, Frederick Emerson, has volunteered to go, and Bethel has agreed to pay his travel expenses in the amount of \$500. The Foreign Mission Board hopes to start a new mission in this vicinity in September, 1978.

At the May, 1978, church business meeting, Reverend Edsel West read his resignation as pastor of Bethel. He had accepted the call of the Holy Spirit to become the pastor of South Harriman Baptist Church in Harriman, Tennessee. In his letter to the Bethel members, he stated that he had prayed long over this move and felt that the Lord was definitely leading him in this decision. He told again how good Bethel had been to him; he declared that coming to Virginia to be Bethel's pastor had indeed been a blessing to him and his family.

The church accepted with sadness the resignation of Mr. West, for the members truly loved this dedicated brother in Christ. The Bethel people knew, however, that he was being obedient to God's call. At a called meeting the next week, both pulpit supply and pastor-selection committees were elected. Later, a resolutions committee was also appointed, in keeping with Bethel Church heritage.

During the seven years that Mr. West was Bethel's pastor, he had seen over four hundred and sixty people unite with the church. The present enrollment does not reveal the total number, for Bethel, as already stated, is located in the midst of a transient neighborhood. However, the records show a definite increase in membership of over one-third.

After mentioning the increase in church membership, Bethel, in resolutions, praised Mr. West's contiguous visitation and concern for each member of the Bethel family. Constantly reaching out to win the lost in the community, Mr. West pointed the way to Jesus. His spirit-filled messages brought the entire church closer to the Lord. He created a warmth between pastor and people which spread throughout the church. With his kind and gentle ways, he strengthened our faith and encouraged our Christian growth.

Bethel also expressed appreciation to the family of Mr. West. His wife was a member of the choir and one of the ladies trio. Both his son, Greg, and his daughter, Tammy, were among the church youth leaders. Greg, a track star all through high school, is now a student at Carson Newman College, pursuing a career in business and continuing his athletic interest. Tammy has completed the tenth grade at Tabb High School. She has continuously shared her talent in music, both vocal and instrumental, with the church.

At the time of this publication, Bethel Baptist Church awaits upon the Lord for His guidance in the selection of a pastor. However, the membership looks to the future with faith and confidence, knowing that our God will never forsake His children. He has promised to be with us at all times, and we know that His promises are true.

A backward look over the past 161 years reveals the fact that the

times have changed tremendously in our country since the Bethel Meeting House was built. They have even changed extensively during the past 51 years since Big Bethel was first moved to Yorktown Road. The wars have been many; the economic depressions have been great. Living conditions are very different now, and indeed the entire countryside has been transformed; but in the midst of all of this change, the church still remains steadfast and unchanged as always, a beacon light to call all mankind to Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour.

Bethel's history indicates that our church is one that has known much hardship and many difficulties, but the "remnant" held on in spite of obstacles. This continuation of Bethel is a tremendous witness to the Grace of God. Surely, the knowledge of such a rich heritage as that forebearance and perseverance, displayed by those members under our Father's guidance, should inspire us today to have an ever deepening faith and a constant readiness to respond whenever we are called to serve.

As Bethel members have in the past, may we continue to push steadily onward for our Lord with that "sweet, sweet spirit" which comes when pastor and people work together for Him. May we be filled with humility and love as we, too, continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour; may His spirit bind us all together in an ever closer fellowship dedicated to doing His will until He comes again.

BETHEL DEACONS - 1927 - 197B

Robert Ambrose	L. L. Hunt	J. R. Stratton
Ben Anders	Roane Hunt	Richard Stratton
Don Babb	A. M. Johnston	Willard Stratton
Clyde Baker	Jimmy Jones	Troy Tayler
R. E. Baker	*Richard E. Jones, Jr.	J. E. Tinder
Howard Bailey	S. H. Liverman	J. E. Trainham
Edward Bradshaw	Tom Mann	*Jerry Trexler
George Bradshaw	Major Manning	H. B. Walker
Doug Bunger	Paul McCarty	B. E. Watson
M. E. Cain	Theron McCauley	Ronald Weade
*Tom Call	*Joe Meeks	*Jeff Weeks
G. C. Canaday	J. C. Mitchell	Jack Whaley
St. T. Carpenter	Roy W. Mitchell	Walter White
Stark Castellow	G. C. Murphy	Maywood Wilson
H. L. Christie	W. M. Needham	
A. B. Covington	Burton Northam	
*W. T. Covington	J. B. Palmer	
W. W. Croswell	*R. N. Parker	
*W. T. Davis	*Ronald Pollock	
W. E. Dudley	A. J. Ponton	
G. H. Ellis	N. J. Proferes	
H. T. Emerson	*Jack Prosser	
Roy Estes	*Wayne Richardson	
L. E. Forrest	M. F. Riggins	
Don Franks	Norwood Robeson	
W. E. Gatlin	H. B. Robinson	
R. W. Giles	*John Scoggins	
C. W. Gray	John Shorter	
**Charles L. Harper	*John Simpson	
C. Lambert Harper	Tommy Slaughter	*Deacons in 1977-78
J. F. Harper	George L. Smith	**Life Time Deacon
Richard Holland	R. Frank Smith	
Frank Hubbard	Rodgers A. Smith	
R. P. Hudgins	Hoyt Smithers	

SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS 1927 - 1978

*Don Babb	R. W. Giles	A. J. Ponton
Clyde Baker	R. P. Hudgins	John Shorter
S. T. Carpenter	A. M. Johnston	Mrs. Elizabeth P. Smith
W. T. Covington	Richard (Dick) Jones	J. E. Trainham
L. E. Forrest	R. N. Parker	Maywood Wilson

TRAINING UNION DIRECTORS 1927 - 197B

Mrs. Elsie P. Carpenter	Herbert Emerson	R. N. Parker
A. B. Covington	Mrs. Fay Estes	Mrs. Ruby Taylor
Mrs. Myrtle Covington	R. W. Holland	*Jerry Trexler
W. T. Covington	Roane Hunt	R. D. Tucker
W. T. Davis	Paul McCarty	R. W. Weade

WMU PRESIDENTS 1927 - 197B

Mrs. R. E. Connely	Mrs. R. P. Hudgins	Mrs. Barbara Slaughter
Mrs. Shirley Crute	Mrs. Hulda Hunt	Mrs. Anita Smith
Mrs. Anne Davis	Mrs. Nancy Parker	Mrs. Alma Tabb
Mrs. Margaret Gatlin	Mrs. E. W. Purcell	Mrs. Ruby Taylor
Mrs. Sarah Holland	*Mrs. Jeannette Rowe	

CHURCH TRUSTEES 1927 - 197B

S. T. Carpenter	J. C. Mitchell	*George L. Smith
*W. T. Covington	J. H. Rich	*Rodgers A. Smith
R. L. Fraser	H. G. Savage	R. W. Weade
C. L. Harper	C. G. Smith	
R. P. Hudgins		*Officers in 1978

Constituted 1840, Built 1876, Last service in this building, August 15th, 1926

BIG BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

York County, Virginia

Exhibit 1



Fourth Bethel Building

FOOTNOTE REFERENCES

1. Reverend L. Peyton Little, History of Bethel Church, 1930.
2. Ibid.
3. Blanche S. White and Emily L. Hogg, History of Hampton Baptist Church, 1966, page 8.
4. Ibid., page 10.
5. Little.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. White and Hogg, page 12.
9. Ibid.
10. Little.
11. White and Hogg, page 13.
12. Myrtle Phillips Amory, History of Grafton Christian Church, 1974, page 2.
13. White and Hogg, page 14.
14. Little.
15. Ibid.
16. Amory, page 13.
17. History of Liberty Baptist Church, Hampton, 1975, page 5.
18. Ibid.
19. Little.
20. Daily Press, July 18, 1943.
21. White and Hogg, page 27.
22. History of Tabernacle Methodist Church, Poquoson, Virginia 1967, page 29.
23. Liberty, page 5.
24. Little.
25. Liberty, page 6.
26. Little.
27. N. D. Blackman, "Historical Sketch of Emmaus Baptist Church," 1935.
28. Little.
29. Blackman.
30. Ibid.
31. Little.
32. L. Peyton Little, History of Newport News Baptist Church, 1932.
33. Little, Bethel.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. History of Liberty, page 6.
37. Little, Bethel.
38. Liberty, page 8.
39. Little, Bethel.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. NASA, "A Short History of Properties Now Included in the West Area of Langley Research Center, NASA," page 5.

Exhibit 2

**DEDICATION SERVICE**  
OF  
**BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH**  
ON  
Sunday, July 17th, 1927

**Morning Service**

10:00 A. M. Sunday School, R. P. Hudgins, Superintendent  
 11:00 A. M. Morning Service Presided over by the pastor, Rev. L. Peyton Little  
     Doxology  
     Invocation  
     Hymn by the Congregation "Come Thou Almighty King."  
     Special Music By Male Quartette from Hampton, Va.  
     Scripture  
     Prayer  
     Hymn by the Congregation "Faith is the Victory"  
     Regular Offering  
     History of Bethel Baptist Church By the Pastor  
     Special Music "The End of the Road" Saw Music  
     Sermon Rev. J. Elwood Welsh, Pastor Court Street Baptist Church, Portsmouth, Va.  
     Prayer  
     Recognition of Former Bethel Members  
     Statement about Our New Church  
     Special Collection  
     Hymn by the Congregation "His Promise To Me"  
     Benediction  
 1:00 P. M. Dinner Presided over by "The Ladies"

**Afternoon Service**

2:00 P. M. Afternoon Service Presided over by Hon. John Garland Pollard, Moderator  
     Peninsula Baptist Association  
     Hymn by the Congregation "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord."  
     Special Music By Mixed Quartette from Newport News, Va.  
     Recognition of Former Bethel Members  
     Short Addresses by Members of Executive Committee and Other Friends  
     Special Music "Whispering Hope" Saw Music  
     Announcement of the Result of the Morning's Offering  
     Scripture  
     Prayer  
     Dedication Sermon Rev. Ira D. S. Knight, Pastor Park Place Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va  
     Dedicatory Prayer  
     Special Music Duet from Newport News, Va.  
     Hymn by the Congregation "Love Lifted Me"  
     Benediction

*Program*

*The One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of  
Bethel Baptist Church, Tabb, Virginia, August 18, 1940.*

1840

1940

**AFTERNOON SERVICE**

2:00—Historical Hour—Rev. N. D. Blackman, Pastor, Presiding

Hymn: "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord"—(52)

Prayer

Special Music

History of Bethel Baptist Church—Rev. N. D. Blackman

Hymn: "Give of Your Best to the Master"—(123)

Address: Virginia Baptists a Hundred Years Ago—  
Dr. Garnett Ryland

Hymn: "In the Service of the King"—(132)

Benediction

Exhibit 3

**MORNING SERVICE**

10:00—Sunday School, A. J. Ponton, Jr., Superintendent, Presiding  
 10:30—Address: Paul's Testimony of the Church, Rev. H. P. Lamb

11:00—Worship Service: Rev. N. D. Blackman, Pastor, Presiding

Doxology and Invocation

Hymn: "How Firm a Foundation"—(76)

Reading the Holy Scriptures and Prayer

Special Music—Mrs. Thurston

Tithes and Offerings

Announcements and Recognition of Former Members and  
Visitors

Hymn: "More Love to Thee"—(187)

Sermon: "Why the Christian Life Today?"—  
Dr. J. Elwood Welsh

Hymn: "Living for Jesus"—(15)

Benediction

**EVENING SERVICE**

7:30—B. T. U., Mrs. S. T. Carpenter, Director, Presiding

8:15—Evening Worship: Chas. L. Harper, Presiding

Hymn: "Onward, Christian Soldiers"—(118)

Evening Prayer

Hymn: "Trusting Jesus"—(77)

Reading the Holy Scriptures

Special Music

Tithes and Offerings

Hymn: "Jesus Shall Reign"—(221)

Sermon: "The Universal Jesus"—Dr. J. Elwood Welsh

Hymn: "God Be With You Till We Meet Again"—(295)

Benediction

12:30—Fellowship Hour and Picnic Dinner.

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY  
October 31, 1965

Theme:

" O God our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come."

10 A.M. Morning Service

Bethel LOVINGLY remembering the past.  
"Hitherto hath The Lord helped us" I Sam. 7:12

Organ Prelude

Welcome Deacon Lester Hunt, General Chairman

Hymn 286 "O God Our Help In Ages Past"

Scripture Reading Deacon W.T. Covington

Prayer Deacon Charles L. Harper

Hymn 379 "O Thou Whose Hand Hath Brought Us"

Message - Rev. H.P. Lamb, Pastor 1920-1923

Choir "Holy, Holy Holy"

Message - Rev. Harvey Nichols, Pastor 1941-1945

Hymn 41 "To God Be The Glory"

Message - Rev. Harold Crute Pastor 1945-1952

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hymn 319 "Higher Ground"

Offertory Prayer Deacon Jimmie Jones

Solo Miss Joyce Camden, Former member of Bethel

Address - "Leaves from Bethel's History"

Dr. W.B. Hackley, Va. Baptist Historical Society

Hymn 463 "Forward Through The Ages"

Benediction & Thanksgiving Deacon R.P. Hudgins

Choral Benediction "The Lord Bless & Keep You"

Luncheon in the educational building

Organ Postlude

Exhibit 4

2:15 Afternoon Service  
Bethel FAITHFULLY serving the present  
"Go ye..Lo I am with you always" Math. 28:28-29

Organ Meditations Miss Shirley Taylor  
Former member of Bethel Church

Scripture Reading Deacon R.N. Parker

Prayer Deacon Stark Castellow

Recognition of Former members and Visitors

Solo "How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings"  
Robert Lewis Crute, Former Member of Bethel

Message - Rev. Clayton Sweet Pastor 1930

Hymn 137 "Praise Him! Praise Him!"

Message - Rev. N.D. Blackman Pastor 1931-1941

Hymn 207 "Rescue The Perishing"

Offertory Prayer Deacon Harrison B. Walker Jr.

Solo Robert Lewis Crute

Message "The Challenge Facing Bethel Today"  
Rev. Bob Estes, Pastor 1960-1964

Hymn 43B "Make Me A Channel Of Blessing"

Benediction Rev. George Kissinger III  
Sup't. of Missions, Peninsula Association

\*-\*

We welcome our former members and visitors today  
with the warmest of greetings. We are thankful to  
you for coming as our guests. Please call upon us  
in any possible way we may be of service to you.

--The Membership of Bethel Baptist Church

Nursery facilities for infants through three years  
of age are located in the educational building.  
Parents will kindly call for their children during  
the luncheon-fellowship period, 12 Noon to 2 P.M.

Restrooms may be found in both wings of the  
educational building.



Exhibit 5

Interior of Bethel Baptist Church Sanctuary on Dedication Day, October 31, 1965.  
Seated on first row, third from left, Mr. Charles L. Harper.

7 P.M. EVENING SERVICE  
 Bethel HOPEFULLY facing the future  
 "Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth  
 and for ever." Psalm 131:3

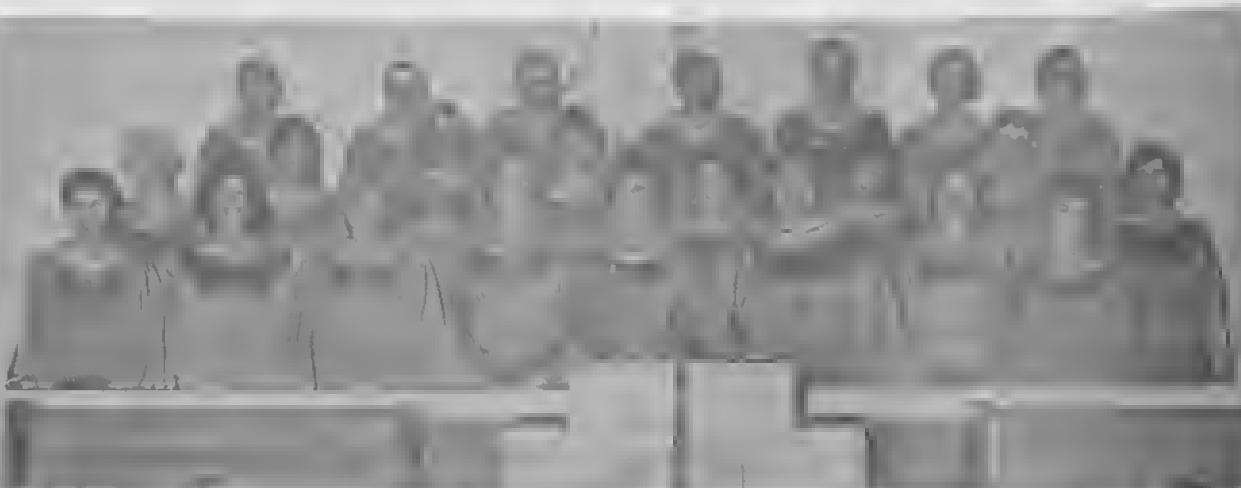
Organ Prelude  
 Hymn 85 "One Day"  
 Scripture Reading Roane Hunt Training Union Director  
 Prayer Deacon W.T. Davis  
 Hymn 310 "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart"  
 Choir "Coming Home"  
 Announcements and Recognitions  
 Hymn 279 "He Lives"  
 Offertory Prayer Deacon Richard Holland  
 Solo "God Cannot Lie" Mrs. Marion Conway  
 Message Rev. Robert Connely, Pastor 1953-1960  
 "Occupy Until I Come"  
 Hymn 119 "Will Jesus Find Us Watching?"  
 Benediction Deacon A.M. Johnson  
 125th Anniversary Observance Chairmen  
 Mr. & Mrs. Lester Hunt, General Chairmen  
 Rev. David C. Anderson, Program  
 Mrs. Elsie Carpenter, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, History  
 Mrs. Ann Davis, Music  
 Mrs. Sarah Holland, Reception, Registration.  
 Mrs. Nancy Parker, Mrs. T.H. Mc Cauley, Publicity.  
 Mrs. Louise Robinson, Mrs. Lucille Mitchell  
 --Invitations.  
 Mrs. Barbara Slaughter, Nursery.  
 Mr. Bill Slaughter, Building & Grounds  
 Mr. Hobart Hansley, Parking  
 Mrs. Ruby Taylor, Hospitality and Flowers  
 Mrs. Regent Wrenn, Mrs. Susan Newton, Luncheon.  
 Deacon Ronny Pollock, Song Leader  
 Mrs. Helen Grant, Mimeographing of History  
 Mrs. Anthony Collinsworth, Organist

Exhibit 6



Exhibit 7

Ladies Trio  
 1972-1976  
 Mrs. Jean Bradshaw  
 Mrs. Dawn Bennett  
 Mrs. Hannah West



Above - Bethel Baptist Church Senior Choir - 1976

Below - Bethel Baptist Church Youth Choir - 1976

Homecoming - 1966

(L) Charles L. Harper (Oldest male member, still active at 81; Mrs. N. D. Blackman; Rev. N. D. Blackman, Mrs. Zella C. Page, (Oldest female member still active at 90); Rev. Robert Estes.



Exhibit 8

Bethel Youth Ministry - Hope for the Future!



YORK CO. PUBLIC LIBRARY

286 Smi ARV  
Smith, Elizabeth Page. c 1  
The history of Bethel Baptist Church, 22

YORK CO. PUBLIC LIBRARY, YORKTOWN, VA.



3 3146 00029 3243

"Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not;  
of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14